

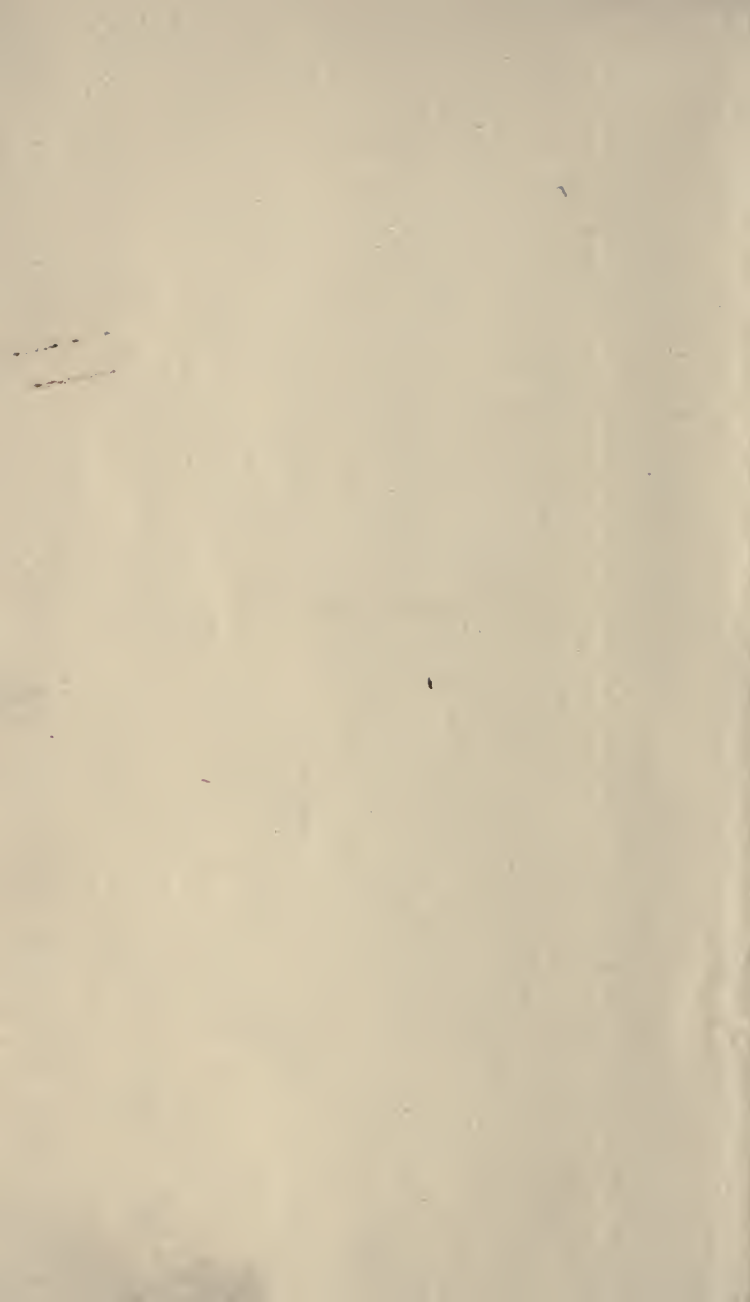






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A King in Babylon

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

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(Now in its 50th thousand.)

A leading paper says: "Here the reader feels is the real thing. Ask me the name of the most thrilling novel I have read for a long time and I shall answer 'Little Comrade.'"

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Paternoster Row

A King in Babylon

: : By Burton E. Stevenson : :

Author of "Little Comrade"



LONDON: HUTCHINSON & CO.
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A KING IN BABYLON

CHAPTER I

I AM writing this story because Creel thinks it ought to be written in justice to ourselves and to Jimmy Allen. So do I, for that matter. The truth is bad enough, but it is mild as milk beside the outrageous tales which have been flying about the studios since we came back from Egypt without our leading man. And if the truth is to be told, it must be by either Creel or me.

I have tried to convince Creel that it is his job—that his long and varied experience in ripping scenarios open and turning them inside out and upside down should give him a terse and vivid style. His spoken style, as I happen to know, is extraordinarily terse and vivid! But he has snorted indignantly, and accused me of trying to shirk a clear duty. Even with the best will in the world, how, he has demanded, could he find time for such a task? And he has pointed out to me, with feeling, how a director has to sweat and slave all day trying to drive a glimmer of intelligence into a bunch of wooden actors, and then sit up all night labouring to inject some dramatic value into the rotten stuff passed out to him by the scenario editor; while a

camera-man's life was one of elegant leisure, untroubled by anxiety, and his hardest work nothing more exhausting than to turn a crank!

I like Warren Creel. I like to work with him, for I consider him in many ways the best director in the business; but even he couldn't have got me started on a job like this if it hadn't been that, from the very first, I have had an uneasy consciousness that some day I should have to do it. There is nothing more disturbing to one's peace of mind than a thing like that—a sort of impending fate which there is no escaping. It has robbed me of many hours of much-needed rest; it has interfered with my appetite and my amusements; it has even involved me in unpleasant scenes with Mollie, when a random answer betrayed that I had not been giving due heed to her remarks. But the climax came yesterday.

Creel had been working all morning on a complicated scene with a lot of dubs who were more than usually thick-headed. He had gone over it again and again, but the effect he wanted *wouldn't* come, and his temper had grown more and more frazzled. Then, quite suddenly, like the bits of coloured glass falling into place in a kaleidoscope, they got it.

"Ready!" he snapped over his shoulder to me, and gave them the signal to start.

I don't know how it was, but just then I found myself looking, not at the set in front of me, but out across the drifted sands, away toward the horizon, where three vague shapes were fading into nothingness. . . .

And right in the middle of the scene, one of the actors stopped.

"What the devil's the matter with your camera-man, Creel?" he asked.

Creel whirled around with a face like thunder, and I suddenly awoke to the fact that I hadn't cranked a foot!

I pass over Creel's remarks, which I admit were justified. We started again, and by the time the scene was finished, he had cooled down.

"What *was* the matter, Billy?" he asked, more in sorrow than in anger. "You never went back on me like that before."

"I got to thinking about Jimmy Allen," I said, though I knew by the way he looked at me that he guessed what the matter was without my telling him. "About that last night—and all the rest of it."

He passed his hand across his eyes, sort of helpless-like.

"I thought so," he said. "It takes *me* like that, sometimes. Right in the midst of things. Look here, Billy, you've got to write that story! We won't have any rest till you do!"

"Why don't *you* write it?" I asked.

"You know damn well why I don't write it," he snapped, with a ferocity which showed how much on edge he was. "I haven't got a minute I can call my own! Why, I haven't had a chance to sit down and smoke a cigar and talk to my wife since last Christmas—no, Christmas before last! My God! what a business for a sane man to be in! I'm going to quit! That's what I am! I'm going to quit!"

"Well, then you can write the story," I said. I knew there was about as much chance of his quitting as of—well, as of Jimmy Allen coming in at the door again, the way he used to do. Creel knew it too.

"Now, look here, Billy," he said, "I want you to make a start, anyway. I want you to start to-night. What were you going to do to-night?"

"I was coming over to see how that 'Red Cloak' picture turned out. I'm a little nervous about the lighting in that big ball-room scene."

"It isn't ready yet," said Creel. "There's a lot of cutting to do. So you've got to-night free. Now I want you to start that story. Just start it, that's all. If you get stuck, or your memory fails you——"

Memory fail me! I wish it would! But the events I am going to try to tell about are bitten in so deep that I'm afraid, sometimes, they'll never fade out. That's one reason why I am sitting here to-night starting the toughest job I ever tackled. For I am no writer—as everyone who tries to read this story will soon find out. But I have a sort of feeling that if once I get it set down on paper, I'll be able to think about it less. Yes—and there's another reason. Jimmy Allen was a good sort; he did a lot for me first and last, and I can't bear to think of the ugly gossip . . .

I shall never forget the morning that Creel had his great idea. We had about finished the feature we were working on, and Creel was more than usually disgusted with it. Everybody could see that it was ancient stuff, absolutely childish and unconvincing, and in spite of the artistic touches and unexpected twists which Creel had succeeded in giving it—and there was nobody in the business better at that sort of thing than he—I doubted if it would get across. And for more than a week he had been digging around among the scenarios in the office trying to find something which would do for his next

production. But the more he dug, the more hopeless he grew.

"Not an idea in the lot," he said to me one morning; "not a single idea—not the beginning of an idea! And an idea is all I need—you know that, Billy."

I nodded, for it was true. Give Creel an idea, and he can work it up to the king's taste.

"The trouble is," he went on, running his fingers through that long, silky hair of his, as he always did when he was worried, "our people are in a rut. All they think about is 'punch'—sensations, explosions, wrecks, and sex stuff. Punch! Why, they're just fanning the air! And they know it! They know the public is sick to death of all that, but they can't think of anything else! They haven't got anything to think with! One of these days there is going to be a bust-up in the motion-picture business that won't leave anything but fragments!"

I knew that was true, too. They were mighty close over at the office, but it was plain enough that when a picture which had cost fifty thousand dollars to make died inside of a month the company was losing money. Big money. And that had happened recently not once, but half a dozen times. I could tell by the way the old man looked when he came across to the studio chewing that black cigar of his that things weren't going right. There were rumours of cancellations—lots of them. The only consolation was that all the producers, so far as I could see, were in the same boat. That wasn't much consolation, either; I don't know that it makes drowning any easier to have a lot of other people drown with you.

"What this business needs," went on Creel, "is

imagination." Creel always liked to talk to me, maybe because I didn't say much, but just listened. "The public is tired of tricks—it's tired of erring wives and reformed drunkards and rough-necks with hearts of gold. It's tired of slap-stick! It's sick of vampires! And good God, I don't blame it! I'm surprised that it's stood for that old clap-trap as long as it has! There hasn't been a picture released for the past six months that was worth seeing. I include my own!"

Creel exaggerated, of course. There *are* scenario editors who have an idea now and then, and who know how to build up a screen story so that it holds together. But they are few—at least so it seems to me. I see a good many pictures—I want to know what the other fellows are doing—and I confess that I nearly always come away with a tired feeling. It seemed to me that most of them lacked not only imagination, but ordinary intelligence. They were downright silly. Not that I could do any better—if I could, I'd be doing it instead of cranking a camera. But one doesn't have to be a cook to know good cooking!

Then one morning when Creel came in, I could tell by the look on his face that something had happened. I didn't say anything, but just ground out my foot a second till the scene was finished.

"That's all for this morning," says Creel. "I'm going over to see the old man," and he jammed his hat down on his head like a man getting ready to face a cyclone.

"What's up?" I asked. "Have you got it?"

"Yes, my son," says Creel, "I think I've got it."

"Find it at the office?" I asked.

"At the office? Lord, no! I found it in a newspaper—in the 'Poets' Corner,' or whatever they call it. That's one thing I've never done, Billy—read poetry. It seemed such a waste of time. But I was wrong—I was just ignorant, like all the rest of them! I know better now—I'm going through the poets from A to Z. Why, son, there's more imagination in this one little poem than there is in our whole staff!"

And with that he walked out.

I didn't see him again till we were ready to start work for the afternoon. Then he came in so amazingly cheerful that I knew things were all right. He grinned as he saw me looking at him.

"Pack your grip, son," he said. "We're going to Egypt!"

CHAPTER II

CREEL told me afterwards what had happened, and I will set it down here in its proper place.

The old man was looking through his mail when Creel walked in, and his face was as black as a thunder-cloud. There was a time when he enjoyed going through his mail—I know, because I started in as office-boy, and I remember how he used to come running out with this letter or that letter and read us bits of them. When he first got into the moving-picture game he usually managed to keep several jumps ahead of the other fellows, and it was “roses, roses, all the way,” as I read in a title the other night. In other words, exhibitors, critics, and the public generally were always handing him bouquets. It’s wonderful how little it takes to please them!

But now it was only brick-bats and cancellations. All the producers were getting them, of course, for the public was growing more and more exacting, and competition was fiercer than it had ever been; but the old man thought he was getting more than his share, and they worried him. It wasn’t so much the money loss; it was more the loss of prestige. He had always boasted that his trade-mark was a guarantee of quality, that any picture with his name on it was a good picture—and he had believed it, too,

and so had the public. The critics got to calling him the Belasco of Filmdom. But they hadn't called him that for a long time now. Worse still, his public seemed gradually to be deserting him.

The old man did everything he could. He corralled the biggest stars in the country; he spent money like water. But somehow money didn't seem to be able to turn the trick. The higher the salary he paid a star, the more money he spent on a production, the flatter it seemed to fall. There was something lacking. Creel said it was imagination. Anyway, it was evidently something that money couldn't buy. And the old man fretted; he lost weight; his temper grew uncertain . . .

So the light in his eye wasn't exactly dove-like when he looked up and saw Creel come in. It had always been Creel's privilege to go in without knocking—something like wearing one's hat in the presence of royalty.

"I was just going to send for you," said the old man. "Read that!" and he thrust a letter into Creel's hand.

It was a cancellation from one of his oldest and most important exhibitors; it meant the loss of the best house in a town of two hundred thousand people. The letter had plainly been written with great reluctance. He had tried to hold on, the fellow said; he *had* held on longer than he would for anybody else; but it wasn't any use. His public wouldn't stand it, and he couldn't afford to lose any more money. "The Soul of Rachel" had finished it. And he ventured a kindly word of advice: the Apex people were putting out stuff with pep in it—why not take the cue from them? Anyway, for a while, at least, he was going to run the Apex programme.

"He's right about 'The Soul of Rachel' being a rotten picture," said Creel, as he handed the letter back.

"You made it," said the old man.

"I know I did—but it was the same old stuff—it was so old it stank! I did the best I could. But the public is tired of being buncoed."

"Sit down," said the old man, who knew as well as anybody that Creel was the best director in the business and that there were half a dozen other companies eager to snap him up—and pay him more money. He also knew that it wasn't money Creel was working for, but love of the game, and he respected him as well as liked him. "What are we going to do?"

"If it were *my* plant," says Creel, sitting down, "the first thing I would do would be to fire that bunch of office-boys and cash-girls you've got in there under the name of scenario editors."

"Who'll I get in place of them?"

"If you didn't get anybody, you wouldn't be any worse off than you are, and you'd save a lot of money. There isn't an idea in the bunch—never has been, for that matter. The only ideas they've ever had, they've stolen from other people!"

"Go on!" says the old man, chewing his cigar. "Go on!"

"I intend to go on," says Creel. "The next thing I would do would be to get a man who knew something for the head of my editorial department. Not a cheap reporter, or a bum actor, or a rounder from the tenderloin. Not a rough-neck like you and me; but a man who was the real thing—a man who was really educated—a man of culture and imagination, who knew art and literature—who was interested in the possibilities of this business, and who wasn't afraid of work."

"All right," said the old man; "give me his address, and I'll 'phone him to come right down."

"I wish I could," said Creel, with a sigh. "But such a man *must* exist somewhere, and some day we'll find him."

"And in the meantime?" asked the old man.

"In the meantime, we'll have to worry along the best we can. But there's one thing you *can* do—write a personal letter—no rubber-stamp affair—to a list of novelists and dramatists I'll make out for you, inviting them to submit ideas, or short synopses, and telling them three things—that you'll read their stuff yourself, not turn it over to an office-boy, and that you'll guarantee that it will not be stolen; that any scenario that is made from it will be submitted to them for suggestions and approval before it is filmed; and that you intend to pay well. And when I say well, I mean well—up to ten thousand dollars for a ten-page synopsis."

The old man rolled his cigar to the other side of his mouth.

"Creel, you're crazy," he said. "The synopsis is the very smallest item in the cost of a picture."

"Yes—it always has been!" Creel retorted. "That's just what's the matter! How much did you lose on 'The Soul of Rachel'? Twenty thousand?"

"All of that."

"You'd have made that much—or probably more—if there'd been a real idea back of it. It was a good film, but it didn't get anywhere—it just fizzled out. It's ideas we want. And the only way to get them is to pay for them."

"Ten thousand per idea is pretty steep."

"Listen," said Creel. "There is one thing motion

picture people don't seem to understand. When a man writes a novel or a play, the money he gets out of it is the smallest part of his reward—though it's frequently a good many times ten thousand dollars! At least, it isn't only the money he's working for—not if he's the real thing. He's working in the first place, of course, for the love of it, as every artist must; but he's also working for fame. Away at the back of his head is the hope that a hundred years from now somebody will be reading his book and enjoying it; or if it's a play, it's the first night he thinks about—the excitement, the applause, and all that—and the name he'll make for himself. We haven't any such reward to offer—we can't promise a man immortality—so we've got to do our best to make it up in cash."

"I agree," grunted the old man. "Anything else?"

"Only one thing—and that is that worth-while men have a pride in their work. They won't stand by and see it butchered. No publisher would dream of altering a word in a book without the author's consent. And we've got to be just as careful. When the right men know they can trust us, and that we'll treat them fairly and courteously, I believe we can interest them. But not before."

"All right," said the old man. "Give me your list, and I'll send out the letters. But we can't shut up shop while these literary lights are gestating. We've got to have two releases a week! What are you going to do next? Got any idea?"

Creel's face, which had been overcast, suddenly lighted up.

"The best I ever had!" he answered.

The old man looked at Creel quickly; he hadn't

been expecting an answer like that. It was something of a shock after all that had gone before.

"Let's have it," he said.

Creel dived into his pocket and got out his notebook and fished out a newspaper clipping.

"This synopsis," he began, "has been furnished by a fellow named W. E. Henley. I never heard of him—but that only shows how ignorant I am, for he surely knows how to write!"

"How much will it cost?" asked the old man.

"It won't cost a cent," said Creel. "The author is dead—worse luck!—and it was never copyrighted—not in this country, anyway. Read it," and he tossed it across the desk.

The old man picked it up and glanced at it.

"Why, it's a poem!" he said.

"It is," said Creel; "and for the rest of my days I'm going to spend my spare time reading poetry. It's a regular gold-mine! What do you think of the first nugget?"

The old man looked at the clipping again, and this is what he read:

"Or ever the knightly years were gone
With the old world to the grave,
I was a King in Babylon
And you were a Christian Slave.

"I saw, I took, I cast you by,
I bent and broke your pride.
You loved me well, or I heard them lie,
But your longing was denied.
Surely I knew that by and by
You cursed your gods and died.

"And a myriad suns have set and shone
Since then upon the grave
Decreed by the King in Babylon
To her that had been his Slave.

“ The pride I trampled is now my scathe,
For it tramples me again.
The old resentment lasts like death,
For you love, yet you refrain.
I break my heart on your hard unfaith,
And I break my heart in vain.

“ Yet not for an hour do I wish undone
The deed beyond the grave,
When I was a King in Babylon
And you were a Virgin Slave.” *

“ Do you get it ? ” asked Creel, when the old man had finished.

The old man nodded.

“ I kind of get it,” he said.

“ And the title—there it is—‘ A King in Babylon.’ ”

The old man nodded again, and read the poem through a second time.

“ Of course I haven’t got it worked out yet,” Creel went on, “ but the more I think about it, the more possibilities I see. I’m just going to rough it in, now. I’ll work out the details on the way over.”

“ The way over where ? ” asked the old man.

“ The way over to Egypt,” says Creel.

“ Oh,” says the old man, “ are you going to Egypt ? ”

“ There’s no use to go to Babylon,” says Creel.

“ I was looking, just the other day, at a picture of the ruins—they’ve been excavating there, you know—but they’re just a lot of fragments of brick walls,—like houses after a fire. And the country round about is as ugly as a mud fence.”

“ We could build some ruins,” the old man suggested.

“ No, we couldn’t—the people would spot the fake at once, and despise it. I want this to be the

* These verses are quoted, by permission, from W. E. Henley’s *Poems*, published by David Nutt, London.

real thing—ruins and natives and atmosphere and everything. And the only place to get atmosphere is on the spot. Egypt is the place—magnificent ruins, atmosphere so thick you can cut it with a knife, and a sort of reputation for mystery which is just what we want in this picture.”

“But, great Scott, Creel,” said the old man, “I can’t afford to send an expedition to Egypt! It would cost a hundred thousand dollars.”

“No, it won’t,” said Creel. “If this picture costs over thirty thousand, you can take it out of my salary. Some of the stuff, of course, can be done here. For the Egyptian stuff, I’ll take only six or seven people. I’ll need a lot of natives, but they are cheap. I don’t believe in crowds anyway, except as a background.”

“How about costumes?” asked the old man.

“They’ll cost something, for they’ve got to be right. But we’ll need only a few elaborate ones.”

“Hum-m-m,” said the old man, looking along his nose. “I don’t mind telling you, Creel—I guess you know it, anyway—that we’ve got to do something pretty soon, or quit. Do you really think this is it?”

“Yes,” said Creel; “I really do.”

“Well, then,” said the old man, “go ahead. And don’t stint yourself. Do it right. We’ve got some pretty fair stuff ready for the next three months, and if this turns out all right, we’ll make it our big spring release. Maybe by that time we’ll have heard from some of these authors—or maybe you’ll have found that highbrow wonder you were talking about. Who do you want for the leads?”

“I want Jimmy Allen, for one.”

“All right; I can get him.”

"And Félice Tabor for the other."

The old man frowned. He didn't like Félice Tabor.

"She's under contract to the Apex," he objected, "and I'd hate to ask any favours of those people. Won't anybody else do?"

"She's the type," said Creel. "And she can act."

The old man grunted sceptically.

"I never thought so," he said. "But if you want her, I'll see what I can do. Anybody else?"

"No—nobody but people we've got. I'll take my wife and Mollie Adams as seconds; and Digby to fill in and look after the props; and I want Billy Williams for the camera-man. And—oh, yes—plenty of film—fifteen thousand feet, anyway. And it will have to be special film for tropical work. You'd better order it right away."

"All right," said the old man again, and picked up his pen. "Let me know how you're getting on," he added, as Creel rose.

"I will," said Creel, and started for the door.

"And, Creel," added the old man, when his hand was on the knob; "don't think I don't appreciate all you're doing. I do. And I'm ready to back you to my last cent."

And Creel was so overwhelmed by this unexampled outburst, that he didn't get his breath till he was out in the yard again. Then he took off his hat and ran his fingers through his hair; and I'm sure that his eyes were a little moist.

"Things must be worse than I thought," he said to himself. "Well, old boy, it's up to you!"

And with that, he went home to lunch and told the news to his wife.

CHAPTER III

I HAVE often thought that if, on the Day of Judgment, room could be found in Heaven for only one person from this earth, Ma Creel would be that person. I am not alone in that opinion. Most of those who know Ma Creel share it, among them—or rather, in the forefront of them—Mollie Adams, whom Ma Creel has raised.

Mollie's father was Hugh Adams, perhaps the greatest acrobat of his generation, and her mother was Ma Creel's sister, and when her father lost his life through the snapping of a guy wire, and her mother died of shock two days later, why, of course, Ma Creel took her. And whether through Ma Creel's influence, or her own disposition, or both, she grew up to be the sweetest, cleverest, and most tormenting girl that I have ever known. Of course she had gone into the movies as soon as she could walk, almost ; and the principal trial of my life was the fact that she was away so much, on other locations ; and recently, she had been doing some work for the Apex . . .

I may as well state here that I am in love with Mollie, and have been ever since she was a kid. In fact, she isn't much more than a kid, even yet ! Just at the dangerous age when she might lose her head

over some handsome scoundrel. Consequently, when Creel told me to pack my bag for Egypt, I did not respond with any great enthusiasm, not knowing what his arrangements as to his family were.

The state of my affections was, of course, no secret, and Creel smiled dryly as he looked at me.

"You don't seem to be overjoyed," he said. "It's a great chance, but if you don't want to go . . ."

"Is Mollie going?" I blurted out.

"Yes, Mollie's going—but if you'd rather stay on here . . ."

"Oh, shut up!" I said. "You know what I mean!"

"Yes," said Creel, "I do. And all I've got to say is this: if you can't finish your job with two long sea-voyages and two or three weeks in the desert, I'm going to give you the boot myself, if Mollie hasn't the heart to, when we get back!"

"All right," I said; "I agree to that!"

And I did my work that afternoon with the blood singing in my ears. Yes, if I couldn't bring Mollie to terms on a trip like that, I might as well quit. Up to the present, I really hadn't had a fair chance. She was away so much, that there hadn't been time for a decisive action. Just when I had my artillery preparation complete, and was ready to rush in my infantry, she would whisk away to the other side of the country!

At that time, she was working with a company down in Florida, and I hadn't seen her for a month. I kept up a daily bombardment of clippings and bon-bons and such things, but the only reply I drew was a very occasional postcard telling of the ripping time she was having, or a photograph showing her in the midst of a bunch of obviously-enslaved muts,

who were looking at her in a way that made me want to smash the lot of them. And when I found out that our male lead was to be Jimmy Allen, and that Creel and old Digby were the only other men in the party except myself, I felt better than ever.

Jimmy Allen was a square fellow, and he wouldn't flirt with Mollie, because he knew how I felt about her. Probably he wouldn't have flirted with her anyway, for he never seemed to have any real affinity for women. He was a splendid actor, and his love-scenes certainly looked the real thing; but I happened to know that more than one leading lady who had tried to continue them off-stage had been turned down. Not harshly, of course; Jimmy couldn't be harsh with any one; but he just hadn't seemed to understand. For one party not to seem to understand, when the other party knows all the time that he *does* understand, is deadly in a case like that!

Jimmy was cursed with the fatal gift of beauty. It was that which, in the beginning, had caused him to be singled out from the extras. He had dark, mysterious eyes, and crinkly black hair that waved just enough and not too much, and a dusky, lustrous sort of skin that the camera somehow made the most of. There was something about him that always struck me as Oriental—though the only Orientals I knew were Jews—and old Omar, whom I had recently discovered—and he wasn't in the least like them. And I also knew his father and mother, an unassuming Irish couple living in Jersey City, where his father was sergeant of police. So there couldn't really have been anything Oriental about him; it was just chance which had given him that appearance. At least, so I thought then. I know better now.

Well, his good looks had brought him many a punching as a boy, which left his black eyes blacker than ever and his shapely nose dripping gore, and no doubt he had cursed them often enough; but they had proved a blessing in the end. In the first place, they had caused him to be singled out from the crowd of boys loafing around the gate of the Pathé studio when a bell-boy had been wanted in a hurry. Other small parts had followed; he had worked hard, as he matured; and when it was finally discovered that he could act as well as look soulful, and that the public liked him, there wasn't any limit to his future!

I'm bound to say that Jimmy wasn't spoiled by it. He still lived at home, and brought his mother over occasionally to see Ma Creel, and kept on fighting off the ladies. There was really something lacking in him where women were concerned. It wasn't that he didn't like them—he did, in a way—liked to have them around, liked to josh them, liked to put an arm about them sometimes—but beyond that he wasn't interested. Funny thing, too—the quickest and surest way to make him mad was to intimate any resemblance to Galahad!

If I hadn't known better, I'd have said there was a great love in his life which left no room for any small ones. But that was nonsense. I had known him since he was a boy; I had even helped punch those black eyes of his; and there had never been the suspicion of a girl. Since we came back from Egypt, I have thought it over a good deal, and I think that now I understand . . .

We finished the picture we were on, and I had a chance to loaf a little and go around and see what

the other fellows were doing, while Creel got things into shape for his great film. He was a busy man, those days. In the first place, he had to get his idea sketched out, so that he could tell what would be needed in the way of props and backgrounds and locations; but he kept mighty quiet about it for fear some inkling of it would leak out, and some other producer would beat him to it with a cheap production that would ruin his. I don't believe he ever showed that clipping to any one but the old man till we were well on our way to Egypt—I know he didn't show it to me till long afterwards, and I hadn't the slightest idea what the film was to be about. If there had been any way for him to suppress Henley's poems and destroy all existing copies, he'd have done it without the slightest compunction!

Then, after he had decided what locations he'd need, he had to find them; and he studied photographs and talked to the experts up at the Metropolitan Art Museum till he knew Egypt pretty well from one end to the other. I gathered that what he was looking for was some imposing place at the edge of the desert, which had not been fully excavated, and where he could set his gangs at work, and from this I inferred that Jimmy Allen was to play the part of an explorer digging into the old tombs, and, of course, making all sorts of startling discoveries. When I think of the discoveries we really made . . .

And at about this stage, Creel struck a snag which nearly upset the whole plan, for he discovered that it was exceedingly doubtful if he could get into Egypt at all. What with threats of a Turkish attack on the Suez Canal and her desire to keep secret her own preparations to meet it, England wasn't exactly

welcoming any visitors to Egypt just then. Moreover, the United States government, while stoutly maintaining the right of its citizens to go anywhere they wanted to, was declining to issue passports to anybody who couldn't show a good and sufficient reason for going, and without passports it was impossible to get on a ship—to say nothing of getting off again!

In the beginning, Creel's application came back with the intimation that it would be perhaps as well for him to confine his activities to America for the present; and his subsequent protestations as to the immense service he was planning for the cause of art were received coldly, not to say sceptically. Finally he gathered together our photographs and pedigrees and birth-certificates, and departed grimly for Washington. He was gone three or four days, and when he came back, he had not only the passports, but a letter from the British ambassador, recommending him to the good graces of the authorities in Egypt. How he got it I don't know. He has always refused to tell me—perhaps it is a secret which must wait till the war is over!

Then, just as everything seemed serene again, he struck another snag. The old man called him into the office one day and told him he couldn't get Félice Tabor.

"She positively refuses to go abroad," he explained. "She's afraid she'll be submarined. Besides, I think she's got a new affair on."

"Did you offer her enough?" Creel asked.

"I offered her ten thousand and expenses," said the old man. "Don't you think that was enough?"

"Yes, I do," said Creel. "If she doesn't want to go, that settles it, I guess," he added gloomily. "However, I'll have a talk with her."

He did, but Félice remained obdurate. In spite of the fascinating picture he painted of the great opportunity it would be for her, of his assurance that there was not the slightest danger, and of many other things explained with the fluency of which only Creel was capable, she refused to go. It wasn't often Creel acknowledged himself beaten; but he was beaten then, and he admitted it that evening. He said afterwards that it was Fate—and I am inclined to agree with him!

"I've got to get somebody else," he said, "and mighty quick, too. We're going to sail a week from to-morrow."

"There's lots of actresses," I pointed out. "Too many, in fact."

"It's not only an actress I want," said Creel; "it's a type. I want a woman,—a beautiful woman—with dark hair and eyes and skin, and the look of the Orient about her. I want her to suggest the Mysterious East by the way she moves; I want her to suggest the harem by the way she looks at you. I want her to have the sensuous Oriental atmosphere. Jimmy Allen has it—though with him it's only skin deep! and the Lord alone knows where he got even that! But that's the reason I'm taking him. Now, if I can get just the right type of woman, who also knows how to act, to work opposite him, I'll put over the greatest picture that was ever thrown on the screen."

I named two or three women who had some reputation and who I thought might perhaps fill the specifications. But he shook his head at all of them.

"They're all hackneyed and stilted," he objected. "They've all been taught to get certain effects in

certain ways. So has Félice Tabor, for that matter ; but she has intelligence, and if I could have got her out there in the desert where she couldn't run away, I'd have whipped her into shape. But these other women haven't even intelligence. They'd behave on the Nile just as they do at Rector's. Besides, the public is tired of their tricks."

He sat for some minutes running his fingers through his hair, and I knew what he was thinking : if he could only discover an unknown, a great unknown, and introduce her through the medium of a great picture ! That would be a double triumph ! At last he jumped up, shaking his head.

"Let's forget our troubles by looking at other people's," he said, and we spent the rest of the evening in and out of the picture houses along Broadway.

The pictures we saw were, of course, the very cream of the week's releases—otherwise they wouldn't have been on Broadway ; but we grew more and more depressed as we went from one to another. One had been adapted from a comic opera, one from a play, and three from books. They were well-staged and well-acted, the photography and lighting were excellent, the direction in many instances artistic and subtle ; but their plots, in so far as they could be said to possess plots at all, were puerile. In the play, the puerility had been disguised by brilliant dialogue, and in the books by clever characterization ; but stripped of words and set naked on the screen, they were enough to make the angels weep !

Creel's face was grim as we came out of the last show.

"There you are, Billy," he said ; "you see the

depths to which the motion-picture business has fallen. Not having any ideas of its own, it tries to get them from plays and novels. But plays don't make good features because they haven't got plot enough and have to be padded out of all resemblance to themselves ; most novels don't because they have too much plot and the audience gets lost trying to follow it."

"Some of the companies are putting out original stuff," I said.

"Original!" echoed Creel. "Noah might have called it that! As a matter of fact, most producers don't want new stuff. They're afraid of it. What they want is the old stuff warmed over!"

"Yes, that's true," I agreed. And it is. Indeed, ?
this story proves it—at Creel's expense!

"And when they try to write new stuff—well—do you ever read the summaries at the back of the *World* or the *News*?"

"Sometimes," I admitted.

"And you call them original?"

I had to confess that most of them reminded me of the literary exercises at a country school.

"That's just it," said Creel; "and that's the sort of stuff I have to produce! Oh, my God!"

"You won't have to this time," I pointed out.

"No," he agreed, but his face didn't light up the way I thought it would. "No."

He stood for a moment looking gloomily up and down the street; then he bade me good-night, and plunged into the Subway.

CHAPTER IV

THE trouble was that Creel was suffering from the reaction which every artist feels when he turns his great idea over and looks at it and tries to work it out. He was wondering if, after all, it was as brilliant as he had thought it; he was doubting his ability to develop it as it should be developed. He always got into the dumps at this stage of every picture he put on, and it was then that Ma Creel and the old man showed the stuff they were made of. There was never any doubt in *their* minds—apparently!—and between them they always managed to boost Creel along over the low places.

They did it this time, but it was a hard pull, for his usual despondency was increased by the fact that he hadn't been able to find an actress to suit him. And the sailing day was drawing steadily nearer—and Creel swore it shouldn't be postponed. He was superstitious about postponements. He and old Digby were so swamped with the work of checking up the costumes and props and making sure that everything was provided for, that finally he asked me to help. But there was one prop which fairly gave me the creeps.

"Come in here," Creel said to me one day;

"here's a member of the company you haven't seen," and he led the way into the workroom.

There on the table lay what looked to me like a half-decayed body. The foreman grinned when he saw the way I jumped. But I could almost smell it. The nose was gone and the eyes; the leathery lips were parted in a ghastly smile, and there was a long wisp of black hair clinging to the blackened skull. You could see the ribs sticking up, and the abdomen had fallen away into the pelvis . . .

"What do you think of her?" asked Creel proudly.

"Is it a her?" I countered feebly.

"My dear boy," said Creel, "you see before you all that remains of Meri-Tau, a young lady once the toast of the court of Pharaoh, but who fell into evil ways, and whose end was most tragic."

"Really?" I asked, for I couldn't for the life of me tell by looking at the thing whether it was a fake or not.

Creel laughed.

"That's a compliment for you, Peter," he said to the foreman.

"Then it's a fake?" I asked.

"It was made on the premises," said Creel, "by Peter and his assistants, under the supervision of an expert from the Met."

When I found that it was only papier-mâché, I went closer and looked at it. It was certainly a masterpiece.

"It is a copy of a real one," said Creel; "but I think we've improved on the original. That smile now," and he indicated the grinning lips.

"Why didn't you borrow the original?" I asked.

"The original wouldn't have done, even if I could

have got it," Creel explained. "It wouldn't stand the handling."

"Will it have to be handled?"

"Oh, yes," said Creel with a smile. "Jimmy Allen will have to hug it quite a good deal."

After all, I reflected, there were some advantages a camera-man had, even over a leading actor. For one thing, he didn't have to hug mummies—even imitation ones!

"Who's your other lead?" I asked.

Creel's face clouded.

"I haven't got her yet," he said. "I've got an option on two girls who might possibly do, but I'm not going to close till the last minute. Something may turn up. I always was lucky, you know!"

That night Mollie Adams came back from Florida, and I lost interest in Creel's troubles; I instantly acquired a lively set of my own!

When I called her up and asked if I might come around and see her, she shied right away.

"I haven't got time," she said. "If I'm going to Egypt, I've got to be getting ready."

"If?" I echoed. "Is there any 'if' about it?"

"I hate ocean voyages, and the Apex people have made me a mighty good offer. I'll make up my mind to-morrow."

"I suppose you know I'm going?" I asked.

"Yes," she said, uninterested-like. "Aunt Mary told me."

There didn't seem to be anything more for me to say except good-bye, and I was just going to hang up, when she stopped me.

"Wait a minute," she said. "Aunt Mary wants to see you about something. She wants to know if you can come around to-night for a little while."

"Of course I can," I said. "Wasn't I just asking you if I might?"

"Oh, so you were," she said. "Well, Aunt Mary will be looking for you about eight."

I spent the afternoon overhauling my cameras and getting my apparatus generally ship-shape, just to have something to occupy my mind, and in the evening I went around to Ma Creel's. I hardly expected to see Mollie after what she had said over the 'phone, but it was she who opened the door. She explained that Ma Creel would be down in a minute, and while we were waiting, she told me all about the good time she had been having in Florida, and how a fellow named Rogers had been blowing himself for her.

"He's a real actor," she went on, with what seemed to me unnecessary enthusiasm, "and one of the handsomest men I ever saw. Not the wishy-washy kind, but strong and virile—the sort of man who would protect a woman against the world."

"I always thought you were perfectly able to protect yourself," I said.

"I suppose I am," she agreed; "but a girl gets tired of the battle—she longs for a strong man's arm about her . . ."

"Well," I began, "I've got an arm—two of them, in fact . . ."

"He has signed up with the Apex for two years," she cut in before I could finish, "and he's awfully anxious that I should join, too. They've offered me a splendid contract—and they're getting ready for a perfectly swell production—and I certainly do like Florida."

"I've been told," I said, "that Egypt is much more interesting."

Mollie grimaced.

"Fleas and bad smells, principally, so Mr. Rogers says!"

"What does he know about it?" I demanded.

"He has been looking it up for me."

"That was kind of him!" I snapped; I couldn't help it. Mr. Rogers had got on my nerves.

"So I thought," agreed Mollie coldly. "He was always trying to do things for me."

"Look here, Mollie," I said, desperately, after a moment; "you know I love you—everybody else knows it, at any rate . . ."

"Yes," broke in Mollie bitterly, "they do! That's just it! What right have you to plaster me with 'Don't Touch' signs? It makes me feel like a fool!"

"Well, I can't help it—and I'm not ashamed of it! And I haven't plastered you with 'Don't Touch' signs—at least I've never observed that anybody ever paid any attention to them. But what I was going to say is that you've never seen enough of me to really make up your mind about me."

"Oh, haven't I!" said Mollie.

"No, you haven't. What with Florida and Mexico and the Adirondacks, you haven't been here enough to get acquainted with me. Now here's what I propose—you come along with Ma Creel. I won't bother you—I promise you that; but I'll be around where you can find me if you want me; and you can sort of size me up, and if you decide you don't want me, why all right. I'll never whimper, however bad it hurts! But I *do* think—if only for the sake of old times—I ought to have a chance before you turn me down."

"I'll think about it," said Mollie, looking at me kind of queer. "What is this show, anyway?"

"I don't know," I said, "except that there's a mummy in it—the ugliest one I ever saw. Creel is keeping mighty close about it—he's afraid somebody will steal his idea. But he says it's a big one, and that's enough for me."

"Mr. Rogers was saying that it's a common report the old man is nearly down and out," Mollie remarked.

"Mr. Rogers had better mind his own business!" I snorted, for I couldn't stand it to hear anybody knocking the old man. "He's been losing money—we all know that—but he hasn't lost his nerve, which is more than can be said of some of the others."

"Well, you needn't get so mad about it," said Mollie. "I think as much of the old man as you do."

"One would never suspect it!" I retorted. "Not to hear you passing on the knocks of every cheap actor who comes along. If I'm not mistaken, this Mr. Rogers of yours was fired by the old man about three years ago."

"He resigned," said Mollie. "He told me all about it. The old man took a grudge against him because he had ideas of his own."

"Importance!" said I.

"What?"

"You didn't finish your sentence," said I. "You left off the last word."

"Look here, Mr. Williams," said Mollie, her eyes blazing, "you're getting altogether too smart for a camera-man. You ought to be writing scenarios."

"I've often thought so myself," I agreed.

"And since I haven't any use for a high-brow,"

Mollie hurried on, her lips shaking a little, "I'll just bid you good-bye now, without waiting for that trip to Egypt."

"All right," I said; and reached for my hat, with a dim notion that I would walk straight to the river and throw myself in.

And just then the door flew open, and Creel came in.

He came in like a whirlwind, and dashed his hat in one corner, and caught Mollie around the waist and hugged her.

"Where's Mary?" he shouted, waltzing Mollie around the room. "Where's my wife? Oh, hello, Billy," he added, seeing me for the first time. "Didn't know you were here. Might have known it, too!"

"Let me go!" panted Mollie, tearing herself out of his arms. "Mr. Williams came to see Aunt Mary."

"Of course!" chortled Creel. "That's what I meant! Well, has he seen her?"

"No," said Mollie, her face very red; "not yet. I was just going to call her . . ."

And just then Ma Creel came down the stairs.

"What's all this noise?" she demanded; and then she saw her husband's face, and gave a little gasp of relief. "Have you found her, Warrie?" she asked, running to him.

Creel dropped Mollie and hugged his wife.

"Yes, darlint, I've found her! The very girl! The living, breathing ideal I've been dreaming of! That Tabor woman's nowhere!"

"Who is she?" they demanded, in the same breath.

"I don't even know her name," said Creel, "but

I happened in at that little house on Fourteenth Street, and they were showing a French film, and I took just one look . . .”

“Is she French?”

“Yes—and exactly the type I want! You should see her eyes! She only had a small part—but she can act—I could see that! Her fortune’s made—and so is mine!”

“But where is she?” asked Ma Creel.

“She’s in Paris, I guess. Anyway, I cabled Powers, our Paris man, to get after her quick and sign her up, and have her waiting on the pier at Marseilles when our boat reaches there.”

“But suppose she won’t go?”

“Oh, she’ll go,” said Creel easily. “It’s a great chance for an obscure little actress. Besides, Powers will kidnap her, if necessary. I know Powers. By the way, Mollie,” he added, putting his hand in his pocket, “here’s your contract. The old man O.K’d. it this afternoon. He said he was glad to give you the increase.”

Mollie’s face was crimson as she took the contract; then she marched out of the room without saying a word.

“What’s the matter with her?” asked Creel.

“She’ll get a hundred a week extra . . .”

“I don’t think it’s the contract,” said Ma Creel.

“I thought I heard her and Billy quarrelling . . .”

“Yes,” I said. “I was just reaching for my hat when Creel came in. She’ll never sign that contract!”

“Sign it!” echoed Creel. “Why, man, she signed it yesterday!”

And then, when they saw my face, they both began to laugh as though they’d never stop.

CHAPTER V

CREEL was justified in his belief that Powers would turn the trick, for late next day he got a cable advising him that Mlle. Marguerite Roland had been duly engaged, and would join our party at Marseilles. I judged it was the artistic opportunity which had appealed to her, for the compensation to which she had agreed would seem pitifully small to an American star, even of the second magnitude—though, to be sure, it sounded pretty well in francs.

With that cable, the last cloud was lifted from Creel's spirits. He seemed to have no doubt at all that the girl thus chosen—on the spur of the moment, almost sight unseen!—would make good.

"The old man is scared to death," he confided to me that evening, when I dropped in casually in the hope of seeing Mollie—who wasn't there. "He wants me to take one of these other girls along as an understudy, in case my star falls down. But she won't fall down—I can tell that by looking at her. She's full of grit, and she'll work as long as she can stand on her feet. Besides, she's the type, Billy—the absolute type. It's almost startling! Since I've seen her—and I've had that film run through for me half a dozen times—since I've studied her, I feel that I'd rather not make the picture at all than

make it with some other woman in the lead. I've told the old man so. He thinks, too," he added, "that we ought to have an extra camera-man; but Digby can do the camera-work, if anything should happen to you."

I knew quite well that Digby could *not* do the camera-work, but I didn't say anything. A good camera-man deserves nearly as much credit for the success of a film as the director—I've seen pictures in which he deserved more. Perhaps some day he will get it. But I'm afraid that day is still a long way off!

With the question of the leading lady settled and out of the way, Creel was able to devote his whole attention to the final preparations. He soon had things humming. The costumes were being made in a shop somewhere uptown, from designs approved by one of the Metropolitan experts, and when they began to be delivered, I saw that Creel had taken the old man's advice not to stint himself. Every member of the company, it seemed, would appear both in modern togs and in those of ancient Egypt, and it was when I learned this that I got the first inkling of what was in Creel's mind. The picture, evidently, was to be built around the idea of reincarnation; and since various directors had been bungling with that idea off and on for years, I knew that, if Creel had taken it up, it was because he had discovered some new and startling and convincing way in which to work it out.

Powers was instructed by cable as to the modern dresses for Mlle. Roland, and was also told to see that she got some lessons in English, as none of us knew anything but *table-d'hôte* French. He cabled back that, though she already spoke English quite

well, he was giving her a lesson every day while they discussed the gowns, and I could fancy the gay time they were having spending the old man's money! The Egyptian gowns which she was to wear were made in New York with the others, and were left with open seams here and there to be fitted by Ma Creel, who was to act as wardrobe-mistress, after Mlle. Roland had joined the party.

In addition to the costumes, there was a medley of other props—camel trappings, a painted mummy-case, an elaborate Oriental tent, with all sorts of cushions and rugs and fittings. Digby said it reminded him of the old days with the big top, before moving pictures were thought of, when the show ended with a spectacle called *The Queen of Sheba*. Even there, there had been no mummy! It amused me to see with what pride and tenderness Digby packed that monstrosity away in its case! For me, I was glad to see the last of it. I never looked at it unawares without jumping.

I had wondered considerably how Creel was managing the Egyptian end of it, for of course an expedition would have to be organized there; but he said nothing about it, and I knew better than to ask questions about what was none of my business. And then one day he told me that he had about decided on his locations, and asked me to go up to the Metropolitan with him and look at some photographs. Even a camera-man's advice, it seems, was worth having!

But even without it, Creel wouldn't have gone wrong. I saw that as soon as I looked at the photographs. There was one of a big, half-finished excavation, with a queer double flight of steps leading down into it, and a row of columns up its centre;

there were sections of a wall, and fragments of other ruins; there were great heaps of sand from the excavation; and finally one of the loveliest oases that I have ever seen even in pictures, with groups of slender date palms and gnarled acacias running right down to the edge of the desert.

"How are those for backgrounds?" Creel demanded, triumphantly; and I could only say that they were as nearly perfect as such things could be. "All right," said Creel. "If you approve, we'll go and close the thing up."

So he went over to the office of the director, and I learned of the tentative arrangement Creel had made. The Metropolitan, it seems, at the time the war broke out, had an expedition in Egypt in charge of a man named Orlando Davis. He had been excavating the ruins just outside the oasis shown in the photographs; but the English had feared an outbreak on the part of some of the native tribes, and had sent out into the desert after him and compelled him to pack up and come back to a place called Luxor, on the river, where there was a garrison. He had been there ever since, trying in vain to get permission to resume work. The museum had been about ready to recall him and abandon the project until the war was over, when Creel's inquiries suggested a possible combination of forces, if the locations suited.

It didn't take long to complete the arrangements that morning, and instructions were cabled to Davis to get the expedition together, ready to start at a certain date.

"He certainly will be pleased when he gets that message!" said the director, as he sent it off. "We'd have called him home long ago, if he hadn't

been so set on staying. He believes he was just at the point of making some important discoveries when the English called him in. He nearly went mad when he found he couldn't go back—he's been moving heaven and earth—wanted us to get the President to interfere. We had given up hope of being able to do anything until after the war. How did *you* get permission?"

"There was a wire or two I could pull," answered Creel, with a smile, "and I pulled hard! I'm mighty glad we have been able to get Professor Davis."

"So am I," said the director. "He's a fine fellow—enthusiastic, untiring—and one of the greatest Egyptologists alive."

And with that he bowed us out.

"He'll be immensely valuable," said Creel, as we went down the steps together. "I didn't let on in there, but I don't see how we could get along without him, or somebody like him. He knows how to handle the natives—can talk their lingo and all that. And he'll know what things are worth, and will see that we're not cheated. The agreement is that he's to help in every way he can. In return, we're to turn over to the museum everything we happen to dig up. Not that I expect to dig up anything—we'll waste precious little time doing any real excavating—but they say you never can tell!"

The oasis, it seemed, was two or three days' journey back in the desert from Luxor, where we were to join Professor Davis. Creel had cabled him to provide everything needed for a two-weeks' stay, and to engage the necessary outfit for that length of time. He had specified ten camels and fifty natives as his requirements, and the rest he left to Davis.

Between the two of them, I suspected that those poor Orientals were in for a strenuous time!

Jimmy Allen, who had been doing some work at Chicago for the Selig people, blew in the day before we were to sail. Creel was closeted with him for nearly an hour, and I suppose gave him some idea of what the picture was to be, for Jimmy came out with his face shining and his big eyes bigger than ever, and I heard him tell Ma Creel that evening that he felt this was going to be his masterpiece. I couldn't help smiling, for I had heard him say the same thing before! None of us guessed how right he was!

The old man had insisted on giving us a send-off, though Creel tried to stop him; and so a long table was set up in the studio, with a shorter one across the top for the guests of honour—which were us!—and all our people were there, and before the evening was over they let themselves go. It was easy enough to sense the undercurrent of emotion—everyone seemed to feel that the affair marked a sort of crisis in our fortunes, and that our whole future depended on our making good. I confess I felt that way myself, and we were all pretty tremulous when we said good-night.

It was good-bye, too, for everybody but the old man. The word was passed around that it wouldn't do any good to come down to the boat, since nobody would be admitted to the pier except those who were sailing; but of course the old man managed to get past the guards. All our baggage had to be examined piece by piece before it was put on board, to make sure there were no infernal machines concealed in it—you should have seen the inspector jump when he came to the mummy!—and each of

us had to pass a Scottish Rite examination before our passports were O.K'd. and we were permitted to go up the gang-plank. It was an Italian boat called the *Caserta*, and she was loaded fore and aft with all sorts of crates and boxes and bags, until there was hardly room for her passengers to walk about the deck; and on either side of the stern was a wicked-looking three-inch gun for the submarines.

It sort of grips one by the throat to look back at little old New York fading into the skyline, as one sails out past the Statue of Liberty. Mollie is a thorough New Yorker, and it seemed to me that this would be an unusually favourable moment to begin my campaign; so I went to look for her, and was surprised and disgusted to find her leaning against the rail, looking as sentimental as anyone could wish, but with an eager young Italian officer on either side of her. She nodded to me so coolly as I approached that I hadn't the nerve to stop, but drifted on past, feeling like a despised derelict. I soon found that I was, in fact, a sort of outcast; for Creel and Jimmy got to work at once on the details of the scenario, while Ma Creel and old Digby settled down to endless reminiscences of their circus days; and there was nothing for me to do but sit grouchily in one corner of the smoking-room, and listen to the endless talk about submarines.

There was one fat little man who posed as an authority, who hinted darkly at inside information about a certain dangerous spot just outside Gibraltar—"I'll breathe easier when we've got past *that*, sir!"—and who had invented a life-saving under-vest, which he displayed proudly. It was stuffed with wool or something, and had a pocket for biscuits and another for brandy and a third for letter

of credit and other valuables, and if it lost buoyancy for any reason, there was a tube through which to blow it up with air. He averred that he could be quite comfortable in the water for forty-eight hours, and I think he rather wished a submarine *would* take a shot at us.

So did I, at the end of a day or two! For Mollie had apparently forgotten that I was on the ship; when she did see me, it was with an air of mild surprise, as though she was wondering where we had met before; she never appeared in public without a uniform on either side of her—young, upstart subalterns, who glared at me coldly and stroked their little silky moustaches superciliously whenever I tried to get past their guard. I wouldn't have minded them so much; but the coldness of the reception I got when I *did* get past simply madened me! But I knew, if we were submarined, those tin soldiers would be sunk in a minute by the hardware they carried around with them. Then I would be left to rescue Mollie!

That was a happy dream; but I admit my heart jumped when I went out on deck one morning to find the life-boats being swung out and lowered to the level of the rail, and provisioned with biscuit-tins and water-breakers. And back at the stern, I found a gun-crew limbering up the two three-inchers, and my heart jumped again when I saw the case of wicked-looking shells ready at hand on the deck between them. And then, as I started down to breakfast, I discovered an excited crowd around the bulletin-board, and the little fat man was solemnly reading aloud a notice posted there, warning the passengers that the signal to abandon ship would be five short blasts of the steam whistle, telling them

what to do when the blasts were sounded, and adding that they were urgently requested to have their life-belts with them at all times, day and night.

It was a rather sober crowd that went in to breakfast, and the sobriety increased when we came out half an hour later and found the crew stretching heavy tarpaulins over the deck-house fore and aft, completely enclosing it, so that not a ray of light could escape from either the smoke-room or the music-room. Then later on, when we went down to our cabins, we found that all the ports had been closed and locked and covered with heavy brown paper. And finally, as a finishing touch, we were put through a boat-drill, and every passenger was required to put on a life-belt and have it properly adjusted. The little fat man, who was compelled under protest to put one on over his patent under-vest, certainly presented a striking appearance. But nobody laughed; we all suddenly discovered that this submarine business was not so amusing as it had seemed, and most of us toted a life-belt around with us for the rest of the voyage. It caught one by the throat to see the children playing with their belts beside them, and to think . . .

But we saw no sign of any submarine, not even at that crucial spot outside Gibraltar; and we slipped into the Mediterranean one night as dark as a pocket with everybody sitting on deck grasping a life-belt tightly; and we finally ran safely into the harbour at Marseilles, where we were to change to a P. & O. steamer for Port Said.

Powers was waiting for us on the quay. He took Creel away with him, and I suppose introduced him to Mlle. Roland; but we had our hands so

full getting our stuff off and convincing the French authorities we weren't German spies, that I had mighty little time to wonder what he was doing. Besides, I had seen the way the two Italian officers bade good-bye to Mollie, and if I had needed anything to think about, I could have thought about that!

The P. & O. boat was due to follow the *Caserta* in—one destroyer had convoyed us both, it seemed—so we didn't have time even to look at Marseilles; though I thought for a while it was destined to be the end of my earthly pilgrimage, for the French seemed determined to send us all to jail and shoot us at sunrise. But just as sentence was about to be pronounced, Powers showed up and straightened things out. It seems he had improved his time while waiting for us by looking up some of the officers he had known in Paris, and, I presume, spending some of the old man's money on their entertainment; but it was surely a good investment, for they rallied to him now, with the result that we finally got our passports stamped, and hurried back to the pier to find that the P. & O. boat was already there.

And then for a while it looked as though they weren't going to let us on the boat; and when they finally agreed to take us, they refused absolutely to take our properties; and then, when they were persuaded that they could find room for them, they insisted on examining all of them, and I had the hardest kind of work keeping them from cutting open my film-cases to see what was inside. It was at this crisis that my respect for Powers went up about a thousand per cent. He was never flurried, he never had any doubt of the outcome, and as a dispenser of soft-soap he could give the French cards

and spades. Well, he finally got everything arranged, and saw our stuff put on board, and waved us up the gang-plank. He certainly must have been glad to see the last of us !

But even before I got on board, I knew what would happen, for I saw some British officers leaning over the rail, staring down at Mollie. And she didn't seem to mind—rather the reverse . . .

All this time I had seen nothing of Creel, which seemed very strange to me, for he wasn't a fellow to shift any of his troubles to other people ; but Powers said it was all right—that Creel had left things to him and had gone on board with Mlle. Roland. After I had gone to my room, and made sure my cameras were all right, and got cleaned up, I started on a little stroll about the boat to see what she was like, and when I stuck my head into the lounge, there was Creel having tea with a girl whom I knew at once was our leading lady ; and Ma Creel was helping him do the honours. I tried to get away before they saw me, but I must have stared an instant, for Creel looked up and caught my eye.

“ Oh, there's Billy,” he said. “ Come here, Billy. I want to introduce you to Mlle. Roland.”

Of course I couldn't get away then, so I went in.

“ Mlle. Roland,” he said, in his best society manner, “ permit me to present to you Mr. Lloyd Williams, our camera-man. Everybody calls him Billy,” he added, “ and I presume that you may.”

“ Please do !” I said, as the girl looked up and smiled.

And in that first instant I knew that Creel had struck gold ! Such eyes, such a mouth—but there, I'm not going to describe her now !

"I am please' to meet M'sieu Beelee," she said, with just enough accent to give piquancy to her talk, and she gave my hand a warm little clasp. I felt somehow that I was going to like Mlle. Roland !

"Is everything all right ? " Creel asked.

"Yes," I said ; " but we certainly had a strenuous time."

"Oh," said Creel easily, " Powers knew the ropes. He told me I'd just be in the way. So I have been looking after Mlle. Marguerite."

"He has tol' me of the wonderful feelm he has plan'," said the lady. "Iss eet not one grand eeday ? " But there—to try to reproduce her accent is merely to travesty it ! It shall be left hereafter to the reader's imagination.

"I don't know," I said. "Nobody confides in a camera-man, Miss Roland."

"Do they not ? " she smiled. " But, *I* will confide in you, M'sieu Beelee."

Her eyes turned me a little dizzy, and before I could collect my wits and stutter a reply, Creel cut in.

"I wish you'd round up the rest of the folks, Billy," he said, " and bring them in here to tea. I want Mlle. Roland to meet them."

"All right," I said, and started out.

The first one I found was Mollie Adams. As I had foreseen, she was leaning over the rail with a British officer on either side of her. Very close on either side.

"Creel wants to see you in the lounge, Mollie," I said, strolling up, casual-like.

Now I leave it to you if there was anything offensive in that ; but Mollie glared at me as though I had uttered a deadly insult, and the two chaps

with her turned and looked at me as though I were a strange worm of some sort. It made me mad clear through.

"I'd advise you to be quick about it," I went on. "When Creel says a thing he means it," and with that I stalked away with all the dignity I could muster. In the bar, I rounded up Digby and Jimmy Allen.

"Come on," I said; "Creel wants you to drink a cup of tea with the new star."

"Have you seen her?" asked Jimmy.

"Yes," I said; "and she sure is a peach. If she can act—pshaw!"

"Let's hope for the best," said Jimmy. "Creel could teach a wooden Indian to act!" and we three started for the lounge together.

When we got there, I was surprised to find that Mollie had preceded us and was being presented. Then it was our turn. Mollie looked up and saw me—or rather, she didn't see me—she just looked through, around and past me at the opposite wall; and then Creel saw us.

"Come here, Jimmy," he said. "This is Mlle. Roland."

Jimmy's face lighted up with a sort of glow as he saw the girl, and I remember thinking that the woman-hater had been winged at last; and then Mlle. Roland turned with a smile to greet him.

I shall never forget the way in which that smile froze upon her lips, leaving her little white teeth exposed, ready to bite. I shall never forget how the merry light in her eyes blurred out to a stare of horror. I shall never forget the convulsive shiver of abhorrence which ran through her. It was as though, looking up casually to greet a friend, she

had found a spectre confronting her—a spectre which she had reason to fear and hate.

For an instant she sat quite motionless, as though struck to stone. Then she sprang wildly to her feet.

“I must go ashore,” she said, in a voice thick with terror. “I cannot go on. It is impossible!”

And at that moment, we felt the quiver of the boat as the engines started.

CHAPTER VI

A MAN who had been at the front told me one day that whenever a big shell comes screaming toward the trenches and explodes, there is always a moment of suspended animation, as it were, while the men wait to see whether they are dead or alive. I doubt if any bigger shell was ever exploded than that set off by Mlle. Roland, and I can still see that ring of astounded faces staring at her. By some curious freak of second-sight, my own face is always in that circle!

It was she who first regained some semblance of self-control. She stood a moment bracing herself against the tea-table and swaying a little with the boat; then she smiled, a hard, thin smile, and sank slowly back into her chair.

"A thousand pardons!" she murmured, and passed her handkerchief across her eyes. "I cannot think what came over me—a sudden fear—a longing for flight. I am like that sometimes! Pray forgive me!"

We all tried to pretend, of course, that nothing unusual had happened—that we were quite used to seeing girls leap to their feet at sight of a man and try to run away! But we didn't dare look each other in the eyes!

"I didn't know you had met Mr. Allen," said Creel. He had seen her face change as she looked up at Jimmy, but he hadn't caught the full effect of it, as Jimmy and I had.

"I have never met Meestaire Allèn," said Mlle. Roland quickly. "Please present him."

And Jimmy, who had been leaning against a chair, with a face as pale as death, came forward and was presented. Mlle. Roland greeted him cordially, though I noticed that she didn't offer to shake hands, and there was a look at the bottom of her eyes as they met his which made me shiver. I could see by the way she sat there, every nerve tense, how she was struggling for self-control. And there was a little metallic rasp in her voice as she spoke to him which told of fear and abhorrence.

The only guess I could make was that Jimmy reminded her irresistibly of some one whom she hated through and through—hated in a way which made any previous ideas of mine on the subject pale and feeble! Poor Jimmy saw all this too, of course, as clearly as I did, and he excused himself as soon as he could, and crept away like a man who had been caught in the commission of some shameful crime.

There was a moment's silence after he had gone. Then Mollie, after twisting nervously about, excused herself on the plea of having her things to unpack; and I could see by the set of her shoulders and the way she held her head as she left the room how thoroughly and absolutely she disapproved of Mlle. Roland.

She apparently forgot all about her unpacking by the time she reached the door, for instead of turning down the companion-way, she stepped out on deck, and a few minutes later I saw her pass the window

with an officer on either side of her. Mlle. Roland saw her too, and smiled a little to herself; and then she happened to glance at me, and her smile broadened, while I felt my ears burning. But there was nothing malicious in her smile. On the contrary, it was distinctly friendly.

"I, too, should like to walk," she said. "Will you be my companion, M'sieu Beelee?"

"Will I!" I said, and jumped to my feet.

"Revoir, Madame—M'sieu," she said with a little bow to Ma Creel and her husband, and in a moment we were out on deck.

Quite naturally Mlle. Roland took my arm.

"I warn you that I am not a great walker," she said; "so if you please, we will stroll slowly; and after that we will sit and talk, and you will correct my pronunciation."

"Correct it!" I said. "I'm more apt to corrupt it! For heaven's sake, don't model your pronunciation on mine, Miss Roland! People will think you were born in Jersey City!"

"Is not that a nice place to be born?"

"It's an awful handicap," I explained. "One never really outgrows the accent."

"I have not met many Americans," she said, after a moment. "But I have found the men very, very nice."

"And the women?"

She shrugged her shoulders.

"The women are too stiff—too cold. They have not charm—or, if they have, they are too indolent to employ it."

As I looked down at her, it was evident that she certainly did not lack that quality. She was alluring, provocative, enveloped in feminine atmosphere.

And yet I knew that there was not the least danger of my falling in love with her. I am sure she knew it, too; I am sure she hadn't the least desire that I *should* fall in love with her; I am sure she would have held me off and withdrawn herself if she had thought there was any danger. If I read her aright, all she wanted was that I should like her and think her charming. Which I did. Unreservedly.

But of course Mollie Adams, coming past with her two officers, wouldn't know all that, and I suppose the way we were walking *did* look rather confidential. Anyway, Mollie stalked past with the faintest of nods—and I didn't care! The officers with her stared enough for a hundred. The cool way in which my companion disregarded them made my heart glad.

"Come, let us sit," she said. "I wish to talk with you."

So I got a steward to place a couple of deck-chairs for us where we could look out over the blue water toward the green-and-grey French coast. It was very beautiful—I had never seen such water and such sunlight; but there—I have to keep reminding myself all the time that this is not a travel-book.

Mlle. Roland sank back into her chair with a sigh of weariness.

"I shall be grateful for a rest," she said. "I have been so hastened, finishing the work I had to do, and preparing for this voyage, that I feel positively—what is your word?"

"Frazzled is the Jersey City word," I said; "but you won't find it in the dictionary."

"Frazzled—yes—but that is an excellent word—it is just like that!" and she moved her hands

rapidly around each other. "It was doubtless that which caused me to behave so badly to M'sieu Allèn."

"What was the matter?" I asked. "Seriously now!"

"Really, I do not know," she answered slowly. "But when I turned and saw him, I had a sensation—oh, a sensation the most horrible—as of one walking over my grave . . ."

She broke off with a little shiver.

"Yes," I said; "I could tell that by the way you looked. I thought perhaps he reminded you of some one whom you—whom you . . ."

"No," and she shook her head. "He reminded me of no one. It was like a gust out of the past—a chilling gust."

"You sent a shiver over me," I said.

"Did I?" she laughed. "I shall have to rehearse that look. Meestaire Creel hopes that I shall be able to send shivers over my audience!"

"If you look like that, you will!" I assured her.

"I can see that this is a very great opportunity," she went on, more seriously. "Meestaire Creel's confidence in me is what you call . . ."

"Touching," I suggested, as she hesitated.

"Touching—yes; and inspiring. I only hope I shall not disappoint him."

"What is it he wants you to do?" I asked.

"I am to play a double part—a modern woman who revenges herself, half unconsciously, on a man for something very terrible he did to her thousands of years ago. And that is to be shown, too—that ancient sin; but it is all in the poem. Have you not seen it?"

"No," I said. "Creel has kept it to himself. He was afraid somebody would steal the idea."

"He need not have been afraid of you!" she protested, and fumbled in her little bag. "He gave me a copy—here it is," and she thrust a folded sheet of paper into my hand.

And for the first time I read,

"Or ever the knightly years were gone
With the old world to the grave,
I was a King in Babylon
And you were a Christian Slave. . . ."

And as I read it, the idea behind it loomed larger and larger; I saw that it could be worked up into a ripping picture—and I knew that Creel was the man to do it. Yes; and for the first time I understood why Creel had jumped at Mlle. Roland. She was just the type—absolutely the type—far better, oh, infinitely better than Félice Tabor, who, for all her *outré* appearance, was inescapably flashy and modern. There was nothing modern about Mlle. Roland except her clothes; and one somehow forgot them when one looked at her . . .

I looked at her now—at her clear olive skin, and black, almond-shaped eyes, and arched lips of vivid red, and short straight nose, and wealth of lustrous hair like a cloud about her face; but it's no use—I might go on enumerating for ever, and I could never reproduce that effect of mystery, of unutterable things, which her glance somehow imparted. Imagine Cleopatra alive again . . .

"You're just the one for it," I said, a little hoarsely. "You will be tremendous! You'll lift them off their seats!"

"Truly?" she asked, eagerly. "You really think so?"

"You bet I do!" I said. "I know it!"

"I hope you are right," she said, weaving her fingers in and out. "I shall work hard—hard. You see, in Paris, I have made but a small impression—oh, a very small impression! My type is there not unusual, and I have had but little parts. Since the war I have had almost no parts at all—France has more serious work to do! I would have been a nurse—but there are so many women wishing to do that; women who have lost their husbands or their lovers, and who were more in need than I. I do not conceal from you, my friend, that it was at a fortunate moment that jolly M'sieu Powers sought me out."

I guessed something of the tragedy which lay back of those words, so simply spoken. Something grabbed me by the throat, and I was speechless for a moment. But I made up my mind to have a talk with Creel, and if she turned out the actress I was sure she would, to see that she got the salary she deserved.

All this time, Mollie and her two officers had been walking around and around; but finally to my surprise she shook them off and sat down not very far away and got out some embroidery. Mlle. Roland saw me staring at this strange spectacle, and looked too, and smiled as though she understood something which I was too dense to see. And then she got up and shook her skirts into place.

"I think I will go to my cabin," she said. "It has been a most pleasant talk. I thank you. You have been kind. I have felt that I could be frank with you."

"Listen," I said. "Whenever you feel that you want to talk, or need any advice or help—or anything of that sort . . . I'm not much account, you know, but such as I am, I'm at your service—always. Creel will tell you I'm a good listener. And a safe one!"

"Thank you," she said, and held out her hand with a friendly little gesture. "I have met one more American who is very, very nice!"

And with that she disappeared indoors.

I sat down again with quite a virtuous glow about my heart. Here was a girl that I could be a brother to! No nonsense—just warm friendliness . . .

And then, suddenly, I remembered Mollie, and looked over to where she had been sitting; but she was no longer there.

CHAPTER VII

HALF an hour later I came across Jimmy Allen scrooched up on a seat in one corner of the smoking-room and looking so utterly miserable that I stopped for a word of comfort. He moved over silently as I sat down.

"Oh, cheer up!" I said.

"It's the way she looked at me," said Jimmy, piteously. "I can't forget it. You saw it."

"Yes," I admitted.

"I never had a woman look at me like that before."

"No," I said; "you've been used to R. S. V. P. eyes and all that. The trouble with you is that you've been spoiled."

"She looked at me as though she hated me," he went on, not heeding me. "By heaven, she *does* hate me!"

"Nonsense!" I said. "It was just nerves. I've been talking to her—she has been working too hard, and you startled her."

"What is there about me to startle her?" Jimmy demanded.

"I'm sure I don't know," I said. "Neither does she. She laughs at it now."

"Well, *I* can't laugh at it," said Jimmy bitterly. "I never thought that any woman would look at

me like that—as though I had done her some deadly injury—something too horrible for words ! ”

“ Oh, piffle ! ” I protested. “ Forget it ! She’s crazy about the picture.”

At thought of the picture, Jimmy groaned softly.

“ So am I,” he said ; “ or at least I was. And she’s the type—the absolute type ; and you’ve only to look at her to see that she can act. But she won’t do it with me—that’s evident enough ! I’m not going to hold Creel to the contract—I’ll tell him to-night ; and I’ll drop off at the first place the boat touches.”

“ Oh, no, you won’t,” I said. “ You can’t throw Creel that way—not after all he’s done for you ! ”

“ Throw him ! ” echoed Jimmy. “ Good God, man, *I’m* not going to throw him—I’m going to save him ! It’s the greatest idea for a picture I ever heard of, and with that woman it will be a glorious success.”

“ Well, it will be two glorious successes with both of you,” I said. “ Come on and get ready for dinner. You’ll find that Mlle. Roland has forgotten all about it ! ”

Jimmy looked at me with those big, burning eyes of his, and there was a sort of piteous entreaty in them, as though he’d give his soul to believe, but couldn’t.

“ Do you really think so ? ” he asked.

“ I know so,” I answered, as convincingly as I could. “ Look here, Jimmy, I’m in earnest about this. I thought you reminded her of some one she didn’t like ; but it wasn’t even that. It was just a case of nerves, I tell you—of overwork and excitement. She’s been having a hard time recently. Now come on ! ”

He got up slowly and went to his cabin ; and I could only hope that I had helped him to forget his troubles. But I didn't blame him for being down-hearted ; I'd have been down-hearted if any girl had looked at me as Mlle. Roland had looked at him. I couldn't forget that look—there was something back of it—something more than nerves . . .

Creel had secured a separate table for us at one side of the saloon, and he and his wife were already there when I arrived. Then Digby came in, and then Mollie, who slid into her seat without so much as glancing my way. Finally Jimmy arrived, and I saw that he had made an exceedingly careful toilet ; and we all dallied with the soup and tried to chatter unconcernedly, though we were all wondering whether she would come, and if she did come, what would happen.

It may be that we were expecting some sort of melodramatic entrance, but she came in quite simply and naturally, as any young girl would, looking perfectly gorgeous in a dinner-gown of some soft, black material, which clung round her like foam. I had never seen such arms, such shoulders, such a neck—neither, I judged, had anybody else in the room, from the way they stared—and her eyes—the way they shone . . .

When Jimmy saw her, he gave one glance and then half-started from his seat as though he was going to make a break for it ; but he thought better of it and went on with his soup. I could hear his spoon rattling against his plate.

" I am late ! " she said. " A thousand pardons ! "

And then she seated herself, and the steward swung her around to the table, and she smiled upon all of us.

"I lie down for a nap," she went on, "and I oversleep! I have been working too hard—yes, that is it. For the first time I find that I have nerves. It was that, M'sieu Allèn, which caused that small contretemps—which I remember with shame, and which I hope you will forget!"

It was said gracefully and lightly, though I knew somehow that she had rehearsed the speech in her state-room before she came up to us; and there was no denying that her smile tightened a little, in spite of her, when she met Jimmy's hungry gaze. It *was* hungry—there is no other word to describe it.

"That is kind of you, Mlle. Roland," he said, with a long sigh of relief he made no effort to suppress. "Of course I shall forget it. I was afraid—I was afraid . . ."

He stopped, seemingly unable to find the proper words, and Mlle. Roland dismissed the subject with a little wave of her hand.

"And you, Mees Adams," she went on, "you have had a pleasant afternoon, I trust?"

"Oh, delightful!" said Mollie shortly.

I looked at her in astonishment. I had never before known Mollie to be rude to anyone but myself. But Mlle. Roland seemed not to notice.

"As for me," she said, "I have had a conversation the most delicious with Beelee," and she smiled at me in a way that made my head swim. "I have unburdened my heart to him—I have told him the story of my life—something I have never before done with a man—at least upon first meeting him! But I feel that I have known Beelee for a long time—that we are old friends. You American men are like that—one looks at them, and one knows them."

"Well, look at me, my dear," said Creel, "and don't waste all that sweetness on Billy. He's an unappreciative young cub—besides, he's in love with another girl."

If looks could kill, Creel would have been shrivelled to an ash by the glance Mollie cast at him. As for me . . .

"Oh—oh!" cried Mlle. Roland, looking at me with round eyes, as though she had never suspected such a thing. "Yes, I can see it is true! He shall tell me about her—and I shall try to make him less lonely! But you, M'sieu Creel, also . . ."

"Oh, I'm married," said Creel; "to an angel; but that hasn't destroyed my eye for beauty, thank God!"

"Rather enhanced it!" put in Ma Creel. "Go ahead, Miss Roland—I like him to be amused. Only remember, he's Irish!"

"Are Irishmen so dangerous?"

Creel laughed.

"No," he assured her; "on the contrary. My wife means that my bark is far worse than my bite, and that I do a lot of talking through my hat. Get Billy to translate that into English for you," he added, laughing again at her stare of perplexity. "But I'm perfectly serious when I say that is a stunning gown you have on. I must arrange a scene in which you can wear it."

And then he told her that her Egyptian gowns were ready except for a little fitting which Ma Creel would attend to before we reached Port Said; and then she and Ma Creel arranged for the fittings, and Ma Creel described the gown to her in words unbelievably technical while she nodded and clapped her hands like a little girl; and I was so busy watching her that I almost forgot to eat. I happened

to glance at Jimmy Allen presently, and saw that he had forgotten to eat, too—though he looked hungry enough, heaven knows—but not for food! And he never said a word—just sat there, drinking in every word and every gesture like a famished man, though she never glanced at him.

I tried to talk with Mollie, after awhile, but she answered only with grunts, when she took the trouble to answer at all, and hurried through her meal and excused herself and made a dash for the door. If it had been our first day out, I'd have thought she was sea-sick; but when I saw one of the officers leave his coffee untasted and dash after her, I understood. Really, I was disgusted with Mollie!

When I got out to the deck, I found her leaning over the rail, with the uniform beside her, staring out at the sea and looking very lovely and sentimental. It made me sick to think of all I had planned for this voyage, and the way it had turned out! I walked around the deck, thinking I might find Mlle. Roland and persuade her to comfort me a little, but I saw only Ma Creel and Digby. They were talking over old times as usual—they were all together in a circus, once, Creel and Digby as clowns and Ma Creel as wardrobe mistress—and every so often they got to longing for the smell of the sawdust, the way circus people always do. Digby was a splendid old boy, and I feel I haven't done him justice in this story, but all the time he was somehow outside of it, just looking on.

Most of the passengers on board were British officers on their way to join their commands somewhere in the east. A good many of them were returning after having been invalided home wounded, and of course they were full of their experiences,

and so everybody crowded into the smoking-room, which fairly sizzled with war-talk, and submarine talk. There were actually two or three of them who had been submarined and lived to tell the tale, and what I had heard on the subject crossing the Atlantic wasn't a circumstance to what I heard now. The Mediterranean, it seemed, was swarming with U-boats, and they were making a special effort to get the liners. A sister-ship of the one we were on had been sunk a week or so before with a loss of eighty lives. It was well-known that the Germans had sworn to get our boat, too. The pessimists were sure they *would* get it, probably on this voyage; others, more optimistic, pinned their faith on the big naval gun mounted at the stern, with a crew always on duty. Life-preservers were much in evidence, and I need hardly say that the precautions against a ray of light betraying us at night were even more stringent than on the *Caserta*.

They were so stringent, in fact, that the air in the smoking-room finally became unbreathable, and I went out to take another look for Mlle. Roland. But by this time, it was dark as a pocket on deck, and after blundering into two or three people and falling over somebody's feet, I was about to give it up and go to bed, when some impulse caused me to stick my head into the saloon, and there was Creel and Jimmy and the girl in one corner, with Creel waving his hands and talking. I drifted up, casual-like, and as he nodded and didn't tell me to go away, I sat down and listened.

He was talking about the picture, of course, and there was a pile of criss-crossed manuscript on the table in front of him.

"The first time you see her," he was saying to

Jimmy, "is in the slave-market. She's a princess—has been captured somewhere in the interior—we'll show the raid on the village, and the death of her father defending her, and all that, of course. Digby can do the father. And then she is dragged away, and brought down the river and put on the slave-market. As you happen to be passing through, you see her—in chains, half-naked, and mad enough to kill herself—ready to, in fact, the first chance she gets, because she knows perfectly well the fate in store for her. We'll get a great scene out of that first meeting."

Jimmy's eyes were glowing.

"I oughtn't to see her in the slave-market," he said. "A princess would never be offered for sale like that—not until the king had had a chance at her. How would this do: I've sent one of my generals to conquer her father, who is an independent old scout and has given me a lot of trouble; and my general kills the old king by treachery, and takes his daughter captive, and brings her to me as a sort of offering. And I can tell by the way she looks at me, when she is brought in, that she isn't conquered, and it occurs to me that it would be a pleasant and exciting game to break her spirit, so I order her away to the harem, and get me a whip—a particularly heavy and savage whip, which will cut her flesh to ribbons . . ."

"Great!" broke in Creel. "Don't you think that's better?" he added, turning to the girl.

She was staring at Jimmy with wide-open eyes, in which I saw again that look of horror. Jimmy saw it, too, and went as pale as ivory.

"If Mlle. Roland prefers it the other way," he stammered.

But the look had passed and she was herself again in an instant, though her face, too, was very pale.

"Oh, no," she said quickly. "Your idea is splendid. It sounds as though—as though—it might have happened!"

"That's just it!" said Creel. "That's just the way it struck me—and that's the way I'll fix it. Now the next scene . . ."

Mlle. Roland passed her hand wearily before her eyes.

"If you do not mind," she began.

"Of course not," Creel broke in. "I forgot you were tired. Forgive me! We've plenty of time to work it out."

"Then," she said, "if you are sure you do not mind, I think I will go to bed."

We bade her good-night and watched her as she disappeared through the door. Then Creel waved us away.

"You two boys run along," he said, and turned to his manuscript.

Jimmy was very silent as we walked back along the deck together.

"Did you see it?" he asked at last.

"See what?" I demanded.

"That look," he said.

"Of course I saw it," I said savagely. "She was feeling the scene—she's an actress through and through—full of temperament. That's the way she'll look at you when you order her to the harem . . ."

I didn't really believe it. I felt there was something back of it I didn't understand. But it wouldn't do to let Jimmy think so. So I rattled on as convincingly as I could. At the end, Jimmy shook his head doubtfully.

"Maybe you're right," he said, at last; "but I have a feeling . . ."

He stopped and seemed to ponder something at the back of his mind. Then he shook his head again.

"No; it's impossible," he said.

"What's impossible?" I asked.

"That I should have met her before," he answered, and stalked away to his room without bidding me good-night.

CHAPTER VIII

THERE are two kinds of directors in the motion-picture business.

The first, and oldest, and commonest kind believes in doing all the head-work himself. He never tells his actors anything of the story as a whole, or consults them in any way. He gets them together, places them in the various scenes, tells them what he wants them to do, rehearses them till they do it to his satisfaction, and then tells his camera-man to shoot. So the actors go through scene after scene without in the least knowing why. Sometimes they never know what it is all about until they see the completed picture on the screen.

There are a good many arguments for this method, the principal one being that moving-picture actors, for the most part, depend on the outside of their heads rather than the inside—in other words, they make their living by their looks, not by their brains, and the only way for the director to get the results he is working for is to treat them like a lot of cattle. And then, since it is almost always impossible to take the scenes consecutively as they occur in the story, it is consequently impossible to build up the action and emotion from scene to scene, as is done in a play. Every scene has to be worked out independently

of the others, and the director is the only one who can look at it objectively and judge of its effect.

The great objection is that, under such conditions, the acting is almost certain to be wooden; and in the effort to get away from this, there are a few directors who like to sit down with their actors before they begin a production, and talk the thing over, so that the actors will understand the story and be able to use in the various scenes such intelligence as they possess. There are also, quite recently, a few actors with sufficient self-respect to insist on reading the scenario as a whole before they go into it. I am inclined to think that it is with these actors and these directors that the future of the motion-picture business lies.

Creel could be as autocratic as any director in the game; but he could also recognize intelligence when he saw it, and he preferred intelligence to stupidity. He wasn't afraid of it, as I am inclined to think some of the others were; and he was always anxious for criticisms and suggestions; discarding them instantly, if they were worthless, as was usually the case; weighing carefully any that possessed a grain of merit, and labouring ceaselessly to get from his material every ounce of possibility.

So, in the days that followed, he spent a good deal of time with Jimmy and Mlle. Roland, gradually building up the picture. Both of them seemed to have a sort of sympathetic insight into what he was trying to do, and Creel was very much elated at the progress he was making.

He had, of course, worked out the plot in a general way before we left New York, and the main lines of the story were not to be changed, but the particular way in which this or that effect could be

best secured was the subject of endless discussion. It was in these small twists and touches that Creel delighted; they were to him what style is to the writer; they gave his pictures an individuality all their own. And both Jimmy and Mlle. Roland entered heartily into his spirit.

Ma Creel and Digby sat listening most of the time, and I would drift up now and then, and occasionally Mollie would tear herself away from her officers and stand behind Mlle. Roland's back and glare at her; but it was very seldom any of us contributed anything to the discussion. In fact, most of the time, it was entirely beyond our depth. I wasn't surprised that Creel should know a lot about ancient Egypt, for he knew a lot about everything, and of course he had been reading up; but where the other two got their knowledge, I couldn't understand. It wasn't exactly knowledge, either—it was a sort of intuition—just a flash now and then; but I dare say it was worth more to Creel than any amount of mere knowledge would have been.

It had been decided, after all, to have the slave-market, with Mollie as the principal slave, and to introduce Mlle. Roland later on in the way Jimmy had suggested. Creel was anxious to show Jimmy in his first incarnation in an aspect so repellent that the audience would be eager to see him get what was coming to him later on; so Mollie was to be treated in the most ruthless way, her spirit broken, her body tortured—business with the whip!—till reason left her and she was driven out into the desert to die. Then would come the other woman's turn; but hers would prove to be a spirit as strong as her master's, and the struggle between the two was to provide the dramatic interest for the third reel,

culminating when the woman, overcome by a passion she had struggled against in vain, threw herself at her conqueror's feet, and begged for love. And he, fighting back an impulse to stoop and raise her, stamped her into the dust and turned away with a laugh of contempt.

I admit that doesn't sound much better than the summaries I have scorned, but the way Creel described it, and the way Jimmy and Mlle. Roland looked at each other as they imagined the action, was enough to give one the shivers. These long discussions had brought them nearer together, in a way; they talked without constraint, almost with friendliness; and yet there was something strange in the way they sometimes eyed each other—a sort of half-frightened, half-fascinated curiosity. It reminded me of two wrestlers manœuvring for a clinch. And sometimes I would see that hungry look come into Jimmy's eyes; and so would the girl; and then her face would freeze over with a film of ice, and she would visibly draw into herself.

For in spite of the fact that her aversion seemed to have vanished, Mlle. Roland held steadily aloof from him. They never walked together or sat together or talked together unless Creel was present, and the talk then was entirely about the picture. When she did any walking, it was with me, and I was mighty glad of her company. In fact, if it hadn't been for her, I'd have been pretty lonesome, for Mollie seemed farther away and more inaccessible than she had ever been.

Well, we ploughed on eastward with perfect weather, zigzagging back and forth by day and wrapping ourselves in darkness by night. We sighted a warship now and then, or a freighter loaded deep with

munitions, but never a submarine; and then one morning, as I was looking over the side, I saw that the water had changed from deep blue to a sort of yellowish-green, and somebody said it was the Nile water pushing out into the sea; and pretty soon a tall lighthouse was in sight, and then a lot of masts and funnels, and then a huge breakwater surmounted by a ridiculous statue in a frock-coat, which somebody else said represented de Lesseps; and almost before we could see the flat shore, we had passed the harbour entrance and were at Port Said.

Previous to this, everybody who was going to get off there had been summoned before an officer with the coldest eyes I ever saw and put through the third degree as to his business, antecedents and moral condition, and all this information had been carefully written down; and we were then lined up, checked off, and delivered to a guard on the pier, who marched us off to be examined again by the port authorities. But there wasn't half the trouble I had anticipated. Creel had his letter from the ambassador at Washington and a lot of other documents ready to spring, but he didn't need them. Those officers didn't seem to be half as afraid of spies and bombs and such things as the people back home had been. They just looked at our passports and then looked at us—especially at Mollie and Mlle. Roland—and told us to run along. I suppose they knew all about us before we arrived. And I heard afterwards that the Russian successes against the Turks had made an attack on the canal so improbable that the regulations had been loosened up a bit.

The train for Cairo didn't leave for about two hours, and Mlle. Roland insisted that I take her

for a walk through the native quarter. I asked Mollie if she wouldn't like to go, too; but she said she wouldn't, as she really didn't care for pig-pens. It wasn't so bad as that, but it was pretty bad, and I was astonished at the way Mlle. Roland enjoyed it. Her eyes were shining like stars and her lips were red as poppies, and she sniffed the air with distended nostrils as though it contained some delicious perfume of which she couldn't get enough. I had scented it long before we got ashore—a peculiar, penetrating odour—a compound of flowers and spice and filth and human sweat—the smell of the East. It seemed to me pungent and rather overpowering, and the natives shuffling along the streets were the dirtiest humans I had ever seen, but my companion looked at them with positive rapture, and didn't seem at all disturbed by their vociferous begging.

"You certainly *do* seem at home!" I said, at last.

"It is curious, is it not," she assented, "but I feel as though I belonged here among these people."

"Nevertheless, I wouldn't let them crowd too close," I said, and poked a verminous old beggar with my cane. "The whole place smells like a circus."

And indeed there was in the air something of that fetid odour of strange animals. But Mlle. Roland declared it was delightful, and when we finally pulled away in the train, she stared out in ecstasy at a landscape which seemed to me extremely depressing.

The railway was a narrow-gauge affair, running right along the bank of the canal, an uninspiring ditch about a hundred yards wide filled with muddy water. There was a number of battleships in it, and on the other side, as far as the eye could reach,

were the round white tents of the expeditionary force—enough of them, so it seemed to me, to shelter the whole British army—and guns, and great piles of supplies, and herds of camels. There were some officers in the car with us, and they just laughed when I asked them if they thought the Germans by any chance could capture the canal.

We came at last to a dinky little town whose name I never knew, and there we changed to a real train, and Creel and Digby checked up our baggage, to be sure we hadn't lost anything, and in a few minutes we were off to Cairo. It was swelteringly hot, and a fine white sand was continually filtering in from somewhere, though the country we traversed was green and fertile-looking, with nothing of the desert about it. And we all grew very cross and uncomfortable. All, that is, except Mlle. Roland. She had taken to Egypt as a duck to water. Jimmy, whom I had suspected of an Oriental strain, was as miserable as any of us, and I concluded that he was pure Irish !

It was not until we were nearing Cairo that Creel imparted the cheerful news that we were not to stop there, but were to go straight on to Luxor. That, it seemed, had been one of the conditions of our being allowed to enter Egypt at all. I don't know what it was the English feared we might discover at Cairo ; all that we *did* discover was that a very fair dinner may be had at the station, which isn't in the town at all ; and then we were bundled into a special sleeping-car, and the long trip up the Nile began. I had always thought of Egypt as a small, one-horse country, and I was astounded to learn that Luxor is five hundred miles from the sea, and that it is only about a third of the way to Khartum !

It was evening as we pulled out of the station at Cairo, but we caught a glimpse of the shadowy mass of the pyramids on the right before the night shut down; and then Creel, who was like a war-horse scenting battle, got out his scenario and summoned Jimmy and Mlle. Roland to sit by him, and began to talk and talk. Jimmy was too tired to do more than nod now and then; but the girl was fairly glowing with eagerness, and there was a light in her eyes as she listened to Creel that I couldn't understand. It couldn't have been caused by anything he was saying, heaven knows! It was as though she saw at hand, about to be realized, some supreme moment for which she had been waiting all her life!

Ma Creel and Mollie and old Digby had gone to their berths long ago, and the only thing that kept me awake was a peculiarly vile Egyptian cigar in which I had invested at Cairo and which I was struggling to consume. I gave it up, at last, and threw the frayed, rope-like fragment out of the window; and just then Jimmy's head dropped sideways, and he opened his eyes to find Creel looking at him reproachfully.

"It's no use, old man," Jimmy murmured; "can't keep my eyes open a minute longer."

"All right," said Creel; "go to bed, all of you."

Mlle. Roland didn't look in the least sleepy, but she rose obediently, and said good-night, and rustled away toward the women's end of the car, while Jimmy and I turned gratefully toward ours. And I was asleep almost before I touched my pillow.

CHAPTER IX

WE were four hundred miles up the Nile when I awoke next morning, and running close beside the bank of that historic river. I confess I was disappointed in it, and the squalid little mud villages strung along it did not seem fit for anything but pigs. I had heard a good deal about Egypt's progress under English rule, but it must have been in some other line than house-building. The home of the average Egyptian, so far as I was able to observe it, consists of four low mud walls, a straw roof about as water-tight as a sieve, and a mud floor. There is a hole for a door, and sometimes one or two others for windows, and inside are a few earthenware pots and wooden dishes, and a pile of dung for fuel, and thousands of flies—not to mention other vermin . . .

We crossed the river on a long iron bridge, while we were eating breakfast, and presently we ran past some most amazing ruins, and then we were at Luxor.

As we piled out of the carriage, a thin little man, wearing a big white helmet and with very bright eyes and eager face half-concealed by a snow-white beard, hastened toward us, and instinctively addressed himself to Creel.

"This is Mr. Creel?"

"Yes," said Creel.

"I am Davis," said the little man, and the two shook hands. "I have everything ready."

"Good," said Creel. "When can we start?"

"We can start this evening," Davis answered, looking at him with a certain anxiety.

"Good," said Creel again. "We'll be ready."

The little man's face brightened instantly.

"Mustafa! Mustafa!" he shouted, and a black-bearded pirate, wearing a dark blue turban and long black burnous, who had been hovering in the offing, strode forward. "This is Mustafa, our dragoman," Davis explained, and Creel nodded to the pirate, eyeing him admiringly. I knew he had already placed him in the picture. "We start two hours before sundown," Davis continued to the dragoman, who bowed.

"All will be ready, saar," he said.

"You will see that the luggage is attended to," continued Davis, and indicated the impressive pile of our belongings, which had come up in the car with us and were now assembled on the platform.

"I will tell Digby to make certain that nothing is overlooked," said Creel. "There isn't a thing there we don't absolutely need."

"Mustafa is very careful—the best dragoman in Luxor," said Davis, while Mustafa grinned with pleasure, disclosing a formidable row of very white teeth. "But of course it will do no harm to check him up."

Whereupon Creel called Digby forward and introduced him; and then he introduced the rest of us, and Professor Davis shook hands hastily all around and said he was very glad to meet us; but

his thoughts evidently were far away—out in the desert. I suppose, about that excavation of his . . .

Only when he came to Mlle. Roland was his interest aroused. The quick glance he shot her from his keen little eyes was almost startled ; but it faded in a moment, as though he had decided she was not worth while, after all, and he turned back to Creel.

“ The ladies will wish to go to an hotel for the day, of course,” he said. “ A part of the Hôtel de Luxor is still open ; it is but a step—this way,” and we trailed along behind him, with a crowd of beggars and dirty children clamouring beside us till we reached the entrance to the hotel grounds. “ There has been no tourist traffic this season,” Davis went on, “ and the other hotels are closed. But M. Pagnon has managed to hold on. Cook’s own the hotel, and I suppose it was a matter of pride to keep it open. As soon as the ladies are settled, I should like you to see the caravan. I think you will find it satisfactory ; fifty men and ten camels, as you suggested. I had hard work getting the camels. The British have commandeered every one they could lay their hands on. These have been commandeered but not yet delivered, and their owner is making a little extra money renting them to us. I had to agree that we would pay for any that died or was injured.”

“ That was all right,” Creel agreed. “ I don’t see why any of them should die.”

“ They won’t—but there’s a superstition that it is bad for a camel to photograph it—kills its soul, or something like that. Some of the natives are a little trembly about standing in front of a camera, but they won’t object if they can move about, as that breaks the spell. I couldn’t get any horses—

the British swept them all up right at the start ; but I got a good strong donkey for each of us. And supplies for two weeks. You said two weeks, I think ? ”

There was a feverish eagerness about Davis, as though he feared he might awake at any moment and find all this a dream ; and he looked at Creel as though he would like to pinch him and make sure he was really there.

“ Oh, yes,” said Creel. “ Two weeks will be ample. How long does it take to get to this oasis ? ”

“ Two days. We start this evening and travel till midnight. Then we rest till an hour before sunrise, and start again, and push on to a watering-place, which we should reach about ten o’clock. We will rest there during the heat of the day, and start again as soon as it is cool enough. If the ladies are not too fatigued, we will push on till we reach the oasis.”

“ It sounds pretty strenuous,” Creel commented.

“ We can, of course, take another day, if necessary,” said Davis. “ You will find the oasis very pleasant.”

“ The photographs looked promising,” said Creel.

“ They didn’t do it justice—they couldn’t,” protested Davis, eagerly. “ And the ruins are splendid. I was just getting properly into them, when the government ordered me back to the river. There were some bands of Arabs about, and they were afraid I’d be attacked. I didn’t think there was any danger, and offered to take all the risk and responsibility of staying ; but they wouldn’t listen. The British are a bull-headed race—it’s no good arguing with them. I found that out. I was nearly wild ! It almost made me pro-German ! ”

"What happened to the Arabs?" questioned Creel.

"Oh, they were captured or driven back into the desert," Davis hastily assured him. "They never got anywhere near this part of Egypt—there was never really any danger. But I couldn't get permission to go back—Lord knows, I tried! How *you* got it, I can't imagine. Not that I care," he added quickly, seeing Creel's cryptic smile. "It's enough for me that you *did* get it. But the commandant here was certainly astonished when the order came!"

We were at the hotel by this time, and M. Pagnon greeted us with a warmth which told of many empty rooms; but he was desolated when he learned it was only for the day! The women decided they would rest till afternoon and then visit the ruins. Creel and I went off with Davis to take a look at the caravan.

"I am glad you are ready to start at once," Davis said, as we threaded our way through the town. "I was afraid you might wish to remain here for a time. But every day, more and more sand must be drifting into my excavations, and the sooner we get to work there the better."

"You understand, of course," Creel pointed out dryly, "that what we have come to Egypt for is to take pictures, not to dig up buried cities."

"Certainly, I understand; certainly," Davis assured him. "That was made very clear in the letters from the Museum. But so little remains to be done there, that I am sure there will be time . . ."

His voice trailed away nervously, and he walked on with bent head, pulling abstractedly at his beard.

It was evident that Davis was interested considerably more in his excavations than in our picture—which was natural enough!—but he certainly had got a good caravan together, as we found when we reached the camp—fifty of the most picturesque scoundrels I have ever seen, a herd of ten camels, a dozen donkeys, and as many goats.

“What are the goats for?” Creel demanded. “I’m not going to eat goat.”

“They are principally for the milk,” Davis explained. “They are very necessary.”

Creel grunted sceptically. The smell of the goats was not alluring.

“Couldn’t we take some condensed milk?” he asked.

“Goat’s milk is much better—you will see. Of course, I can get some condensed milk, if you wish. But we will need the goats for the natives—they are very fond of the milk when it is sour; they will go with us more cheerfully and work better if they know they are to get some, now and then. It is a luxury for them.”

“Well, it isn’t for me,” said Creel; “but I suppose you know best. Is there any danger of these cut-throats murdering us some night?” he added, casting his eyes over the motley crowd.

“Oh, not at all,” answered Davis, with a smile. “They have been selected very carefully. They are all good workers, and vouched for by Mustafa.”

I was going to inquire who vouched for Mustafa, but at that moment that worthy himself came hurrying forward, his face wreathed in smiles, one hand against his heart, to welcome us to the camp. He showed us about as proudly as though he were Barnum exhibiting his circus. It was a good deal

like a circus, and I reflected that Digby and Ma Creel, at least, ought to be happy !

I had never realized how much dunnage it took to maintain a party two weeks in the desert, and I was pretty sure that Creel hadn't, either, from the way he stared at it. It was all spread out for final inspection before being packed up, and there was certainly an awful lot of it. There was a sleeping-tent for the men and another for the women ; a tent for a dining-and-living-room, and another to serve as a store-room for our supplies. And when I looked at the supplies, I was reminded of the photographs I had seen of the British supply base at Gallipoli.

"Do you mean to say that ten camels can carry all of this stuff ?" Creel demanded.

"Oh, vurry easy, saar," Mustafa assured him.

"Each man can carry a hundred pounds," Davis explained. "I don't think our packs will run over sixty. A lot of this stuff is bulky, but not very heavy."

At that moment Creel's eye fell upon a great pile of flat wicker baskets with rope handles.

"What are those for ?" he asked.

"It is in those the sand is carried from the excavation," Davis explained. "They are very light," he added, "and two men can carry the lot of them. If you are really going to have pictures of excavating," he went on, for Creel's face was rather grim, "you've got to have the implements to do it with."

"I suppose that's so," Creel assented ; "but don't overdo it, professor. What did all this stuff cost ?"

"About twenty-five hundred dollars. The war has run the price up on a good many things. I have the inventory, if you care to check it over."

"No," said Creel, running his eye over the outfit; "I can see it's worth every cent of that. What do we pay these brigands?"

"Four piastres a day."

"How much is a piastre?"

"About five cents."

"What?"

"A piastre is about five cents—they get about twenty cents a day."

"Hum—m-m!" commented Creel. "No labour unions in Egypt, evidently!"

"They get their board, too, of course," Davis added.

"The stuff they eat is included in the twenty-five hundred?"

"Oh, certainly! They do not require a great deal. The camels, tents, donkeys, and camp dungage will cost a thousand dollars for the two weeks—pro rata if we stay longer. And Mustafa will expect a present if everything goes well," he added in an aside; "say a hundred dollars."

"I think I can run to that, if he makes good," said Creel. "My compliments, professor. I knew from the first that you would be a good investment."

"Oh, I know the ropes," said Davis. "They know they don't dare try to overcharge me. Besides, this is a bad season, and they're glad to get a job at any price. If you're satisfied, I'll tell them to begin to pack up."

"All right," said Creel; "I don't know why I shouldn't be satisfied."

Davis nodded to the waiting Mustafa, and a moment later one would have thought a riot had broken out in the camp, as the labourers, under Mustafa's eye, began to pack the supplies. Creel walked over

to where old Digby was perched like a sentinel on our pile of baggage.

"Is all the stuff here?" he asked.

"Every piece," said Digby, with satisfaction; "and I'm going to stay by it and see that none of it gets away."

"That's right," Creel commended; "and keep the film cases under cover. This sun is something fierce."

Digby nodded and resumed his seat.

"We can start, I think, at five o'clock," said Davis, as we prepared to depart. "I should like to show the ladies about the ruins, but I have so much to do, that I'm afraid . . ."

"That's all right," Creel broke in. "They can get a guide at the hotel. Besides, Billy here is available—camera-men never have anything to do! Not that he knows anything about ruins, but that doesn't matter! You run back to the hotel, Billy," he added, "and make yourself useful. I think I'll stay here with Digby awhile."

And so it presently happened that, accompanied by a guide secured by M. Pagnon, I sallied forth with the women to visit the Temple of Luxor, which stands close to the river not far from the hotel. I should like to say something about that temple, and about the ruins at Karnak, to which we drove an hour later; but they have nothing to do with this story, and besides they have been described by far more competent pens than mine; only I came away from them with a considerably more exalted opinion of the ancient Egyptians than of the modern ones. They certainly knew how to build! I had never imagined that such ruins existed anywhere on earth

Creel took a short look at them, too, with an eye for possible locations for some of the later scenes of his picture, and at four o'clock—tearing ourselves away from the Commandant and two aides who had called and were making themselves very agreeable indeed!—we all sat down to the last meal we should eat amid civilized surroundings for some time. We were a little thoughtful and silent; this trip into the desert, seen thus close at hand, loomed up as considerably more formidable than it had appeared from New York! I think even Creel was just a little nervous over it. But he pretended to take it as all in the day's work; and the rest of us followed his lead as well as we could. Then Davis was at the door with two carriages; M. Pagnon, from the steps, wished us a pleasant journey and safe return; and we drove away toward the camp.

Long before we reached it, we were aware of a hideous uproar—a vibrant squealing, as though a hundred pigs were being killed at once; and Mollie, who was in my carriage, edged a little closer to me.

"What is that terrible noise?" she quavered.

Davis laughed as he saw her alarmed countenance.

"They're loading the camels," he explained; and then we drove into the camp, and I saw that every camel, crouched upon its belly on the ground, was protesting at the top of its voice as the natives tightened the straps which secured its load. I never knew that a camel could yell so loud.

"The poor things!" protested Mollie. "Those brutes are killing them!"

But Davis only laughed again; and indeed we found out later that a camel yells just as loud when

its load is being taken off as when it is being put on. I suppose the camel thinks it is part of the game!

Then the carriages stopped, and Mustafa hurried forward and helped the ladies to alight. His brown face was shining with excitement.

"All is ready," he announced, and the donkeys were led up, and the saddles adjusted; and pretty soon we filed out eastward toward the hills which border the Arabian desert.

CHAPTER X

WE formed a picturesque procession—picturesque, at least, to the eyes of a New Yorker—and also not without a certain impressiveness. At our head, very upright and dignified in his blue turban, rode Mustafa, as befitted a master of ceremonies, his aquiline nose scenting, as it were, first in one direction and then in another, and sublimely unconscious of the rabble which looked on or ran beside us clamouring for money. Behind him came the camels, stalking slowly and majestically along as though on parade, with legs that seemed bowed outward by the weight of their immense packs, looking out upon the world from under half-lowered lids with a gaze melancholy and resigned. Each camel was led by one of our ragged pirates, and others led the goats and extra donkeys, while the remainder of the crew trudged along behind, bending under their packs, but apparently cheerful enough, for there was a continual flutter of talk running through their ranks.

The tail of the procession was its least impressive portion; but I defy any one to look impressive when mounted on a beast so small that one has to hold up one's legs to keep them from dragging on the ground! It seemed like cruelty to animals to

ride such beasts at all ; and then I looked at Mustafa, who weighed twice as much as I did and whose donkey was even smaller than mine, and my conscience grew more reconciled. I resolved to ask Mustafa, at the first opportunity, what he did with his legs.

So, zigzagging along a narrow road which mounted gently toward a low range of hills, we crept away eastward ; and the natives trailing along in front of us reminded me of a company of the damned, with their burdened backs and their fluttering brown cloaks and their shaven heads glistening beneath their skull caps.

As we rode along, Davis strove to entertain us by pointing out various things of interest—the hills, a mile or two away across the river, honeycombed with the entrances to the tombs of the Kings ; the high-water mark of the last inundation ; the mighty mass of Karnak ; the mud village which marked the end of the arable land—and also, thank Heaven, of the beggars !—but I scarcely listened. For the most wonderful thing of all was that I should be here, in this company, riding away into the desert. As I looked around, I saw the same wonder in the eyes of all the others. That we should be here, riding away into the desert—to furnish an evening's amusement for a lot of people who knew nothing of Egypt and cared less ! Ridiculous !

We threaded a narrow pass between two low scraggly hills, and quite suddenly we came out upon the desert. It stretched away and away to the horizon, one ridge of sand behind another, like waves of a frozen sea, trackless and illimitable, waiting to engulf us. It daunted me—it overawed me ; to venture into it seemed to be courting death ; how we could ever hope to find the oasis—a

pin-point amid this waste—I could not imagine. I wanted to stop and think it over.

But Mustafa, without drawing rein, plunged on ; I saw the showers of sand as the camels ploughed along behind him ; then the natives were ankle-deep in it ; and suddenly my donkey's feet were cushioned and silenced, and we rode on as noiselessly as a company of phantoms.

A moment later, I was conscious of the heat—as though we were riding straight through the door of a white-hot oven. The sun was sinking toward the hills behind us ; it was from the sand the heat mounted—mighty waves of it. The helmet which Creel had given me felt clumsy and heavy ; my clothes seemed to weigh me down ; the heat of the donkey penetrated the saddle ; my legs began to ache . . .

Creel looked around at Davis anxiously.

“ I don't know whether the women can stand this,” he said.

“ Oh, yes, we can ! ” protested Ma Creel, smiling bravely, though her face was purple. “ It's my poor donkey I pity ! ”

“ It will be cooler very soon,” said Davis. “ We will get the breeze from the sea as soon as the sun is a little lower.”

“ Which sea ? ” asked Creel.

“ The Red Sea,” Davis answered. “ It's about a hundred miles away, over there to the east.”

The Red Sea, Pharaoh, the children of Israel ! So we were really here in this land which was old before the rest of the world was born ! I looked around again, with a little in-taking of the breath. And just then, I felt on my forehead the first hint of coolness, gentle as a kiss.

"Look at the sky!" said Ma Creel suddenly, and, looking up, I saw for the first time, the wonders of a desert sunset . . .

An hour later, we dismounted for a short rest and a cup of tea, which Davis and Mustafa brewed for us on a little alcohol stove. It was very strong and black, and flavoured with goat's milk, and we tasted it somewhat gingerly—and found it delicious! There was never any protest about goat's milk after that! Then we tried to talk, but we were all too immersed in wonder . . .

A little distance away, among the camels and goats and donkeys, the natives sat crouched around some wooden vessels filled with a greasy mess, into which they dipped pieces of greenish bread, eating with great gusto . . .

As we sat there, the desert turned suddenly to beaten gold, as the sun sank behind the hills to the west; and then a weird chant rose among the natives; and we turned to see them apparently washing their hands with sand and bowing toward the east.

"Maghrib," said Davis in answer to our look. "The Muslim always prays just after sunset," he added, seeing we did not understand; "it is called Maghrib."

"What sort of prayer do they say?" asked Ma Creel, who was very religious in her own way, and who was watching the ceremony with evident awe.

"They recite a verse from the Koran, usually—a good deal like our Lord's prayer."

"But Mustafa isn't praying," someone pointed out; and indeed there sat Mustafa with his legs crossed, a little apart, calmly smoking a cigarette and looking at the kneeling crowd with an air distinctly disdainful.

"Mustafa is a Copt, and therefore a Christian," explained Davis. "You can tell that from his blue turban and black burnous. And the Copts despise the Muslims."

"Yes—just look at Mustafa," said Creel. "I wonder those fellows don't mob him. But go ahead, professor, and tell us some more. What is a Copt, anyway?"

"The Copts are probably the direct descendants of the ancient Egyptians," explained Davis obligingly. "Mustafa is a good type—look at his profile—he might have stepped right off an ancient monument—while the fellahin there are of a more or less negroid type. When the Arabs conquered Egypt, they persecuted the Copts in every way they could think of—among other things, forcing them to wear dark colours as a mark of their inferiority. They can wear any kind they want to now, of course; but they still stick to the dark clothes—they take a pride in them."

"Like the Beggars of Holland—and Gothic architecture—and all that," supplemented Creel; and Davis nodded, with a glance of surprise that a mere moving-picture man should know anything about such matters.

But the prayer was ended, and Mustafa, taking a last long pull at his cigarette, threw it away, rose and came toward us.

"We will go on, if you please, saars," he said; and summoned two boys to clear away the tea-things; and in a few minutes we were again in the saddle.

Quite suddenly the colour faded from the sky, darkness fell, and the stars leaped out. Leaped is the only word for it—and such stars! Our

caravan became a line of shadows, drifting across the desert without a sound.

Involuntarily we drew closer together, and I somehow found myself riding by Mollie's side. Her face was only a white blur in the darkness, but it seemed to me friendlier than it had been for a long time. Indeed, from the moment she had nestled up to me in the carriage, I had felt that the hatchet was buried. And I resolved that it should not be I who dug it up!

"Splendid, isn't it?" I said, reining nearer to her.

She nodded, looking at me with shining eyes.

"Aren't you glad you came?" I asked.

"Yes; it's wonderful! Too wonderful for talk!"

I agreed with her and we rode on in silence. And I began to hope again. Perhaps, after all, out here in the desert, with no uniforms around, I might still have a chance . . .

It was by the stars, I suppose, that Mustafa guided himself. At any rate, his pace never faltered. Behind him plodded the camels, strangely at home in these surroundings; and then the dark mass of natives, drifting like a cloud across the glimmering sand; and as they went, they crooned a low, grave-yard chant, well-suited to a land which had been dead for centuries! It went on and on; my eyes closed; my head nodded . . .

I caught myself as I was slipping from the saddle and the shock of it startled me wide awake. I looked around a little sheepishly to see if Mollie had noticed—and found myself gazing into the dark eyes of Mlle. Roland.

"You were nearly asleep!" she taunted, in a low voice. "I saw you nodding!"

"I caught myself just in time," I admitted, wondering what had become of Mollie. "Aren't you sleepy?"

"Oh, no, no!" she breathed. "I feel as though I should never sleep again!"

"I feel as though I should never be fully awake again," I said. "This is getting into my blood. The rest of my life will be passed in a kind of trance."

She smiled again at that, and her face seemed very wonderful. I noted how the starlight was caught in her hair and reflected in her eyes.

"There would be many fates worse than that!" she murmured.

Yes, I reflected, there were many worse fates than that—to live, as it were, drugged by this perfumed atmosphere, without thought for the past or care for the future . . .

Perplexed no more with human or divine,
To-morrow's tangle to the winds resign—

"Oh, look, look!" cried my companion, and following her pointed finger, I saw that the horizon ahead of us was flushed with rose. "It is the moon!" she breathed.

The flush deepened, grew, shot up into the sky, and then, over the horizon's brim, peeped a glowing disc . . .

It was not the cold, white moon I knew; but a more brilliant orb, burning with its own light, throwing a rosy flush over the grey sand, transforming the world into a wonderland . . .

We rode on in silence, with rapt faces and trembling hearts . . .

Out of the darkness ahead came a sharp word of command, startlingly loud in the silence.

"It is here we stop," said Davis's voice, and I realized that the word of command had come from Mustafa.

In a moment the natives had thrown off their packs; the camels were kneeling down and being relieved of their burdens, protesting with weird screams. As I slipped from the saddle, and helped Mlle. Roland to dismount, Mustafa appeared out of the darkness and spoke to Davis.

"We will put up the tent for the ladies," said the latter, after a moment, "but we men will sleep in our blankets. The halt is only for a few hours—we will be off again at dawn. Perhaps some fruit would be welcome."

Mustafa hurried away again, and presently a native appeared, with a basket of oranges and dark brown dates . . .

As I looked around, I could see dimly that we had halted beside a huge mound of sand.

"Is this an oasis?" I asked Davis.

He laughed at the question.

"That mound is a tomb buried in the sand," he said. "There is no evidence that there was ever any vegetation here. The tomb was opened some years ago," he added, "but it had been rifled by the Arabs."

"What on earth did anyone want to build a tomb away out here for?" asked Ma Creel.

"I do not know, madam," answered Davis. "Nobody knows. The ruins to which we are going are much farther in the desert, and yet I believe there is a tomb among them—perhaps more than one. There are many things about ancient Egypt we do not understand—but perhaps, some day—At least, I hope to solve the riddle of those tombs."

There was an intensity in his manner which

impressed us, and a little silence followed. Then, suddenly, Mlle. Roland laughed—a low laugh full of mockery.

“It is but one riddle of a thousand, is it not?” she asked.

Davis had started round toward her nervously at the sound of that laugh; now he stood blinking at her uncertainly.

“One of many thousand,” he said quietly at last; “but still worth solving. There is your tent, ladies,” he added, in another tone, and I saw that a white shape had arisen against the mound.

“Is—is it all right?” asked Mollie, a little tremulously.

“Perfectly all right,” Davis assured her. “There is not the slightest danger. The natives are camped on the other side of the mound, and we shall be sleeping just outside.”

“If we only had a light,” began Ma Creel.

“There is a light, madam,” Davis broke in; and indeed the tent was suddenly illuminated faintly from within. “You will find it very comfortable.”

Nevertheless, by a sort of common impulse, we accompanied them to the door of the tent. Ma Creel was the first to enter, and she gave a cry of delighted astonishment.

“But look!” she cried. “It is perfect! Come in! Come in!”

We crowded in at the door and saw that it was, indeed, surprisingly well-arranged. Curtains of canvas divided it into three apartments, in each of which was a cot, spread with spotless blankets. Beside each cot lay a narrow rug, and on this stood a folding-chair. The entrance formed a sort of vestibule, in which stood a folding-table, with basin and

pitcher of water, and soap and towels. There was even a mirror. The light came from an oil-lamp, hung against the centre-pole.

"Oh, I feel all right, now!" said Ma Creel. "This is like home! Good-night, everybody!"

We bade them good-night, and Mustafa led us to the spot where our own blankets had been spread upon the sand.

"Iss anything else required, saars?" he asked, looking around at us.

"No, I think not," Davis answered.

"Then good-night, saars," said Mustafa, and disappeared around the mound.

We could hear the amused voices of the women as they prepared themselves for bed, and I reflected that the hatchet between Mollie and Mlle. Roland must be buried, too! Such silly antagonism could not survive amid such surroundings—the desert was too downright, too real, too august. And I was glad.

Davis, sitting on his blanket, was removing coat and shoes, and we followed his example. As I lay back, I felt that the sand was pleasantly warm; it adjusted itself to the body almost like a feather-bed. I pulled the other blanket over me, and stared up at the stars. This was an adventure worth having! Whether the film was a success or failure, I was getting something out of this expedition which I would never forget.

So were we all—Creel and Mollie and even old Digby—Mlle. Roland perhaps most of all—I remembered how her eyes had shone—as brightly as the stars—and there never were such stars—or such a moon . .

CHAPTER XI

MUSTAFA awakened us an hour before dawn. He had coffee ready, and while we drank it, the natives struck the tent and loaded the camels and shouldered their packs, and presently we were streaming away eastward again. The horizon ahead of us was a dull grey; but gradually it brightened to pearl, then flushed to a faint rose, then to yellow and gold. The desert changed colour, too—from grey to a yellowish-brown, marked with livid marblings where the sand folded into waves—and always on every side it seemed ready to rush down upon us and overwhelm us.

Mustafa finally gave the signal to stop for breakfast, and our native cook served us a surprisingly appetizing meal; and then we pressed on again. For an hour or two, the heat was scarcely noticeable; then, as the sun climbed higher, it grew more and more oppressive, till at last Creel protested.

"I don't think we ought to be riding under this sun," he said to Davis. "Some of us will have a heat-stroke."

"If we stop now we will lose a day," Davis protested.

"We'd better lose a day than lose our lives," said Creel. "I think we ought to stop."

"Very well," Davis assented, but he did not look pleased. I could see that, if left to himself, he would have cracked the whip over the whole outfit and hurried us on. Those ruins were calling him!

He signalled to Mustafa; the caravan halted; the natives dropped their packs with alacrity; some shelters were run up, and under them we drowsed till late afternoon. Then we were off again, stopping only for dinner at sunset, and it was very late before we camped for the night.

We had all of us grown a little moody during the day—or perhaps reflective would be a better word. At any rate, there had been little attempt at talk; we had ridden along in silence, singly; and now, when we dismounted, instead of lingering around the basket of fruit which one of the servants set before us, we scattered as soon as we decently could. My own impulse was to get away for a quiet smoke before turning in; and I had just settled myself comfortably in the sand when I was surprised, and not too well pleased, to see some one coming toward me. I lay still, hoping he would go past, but he evidently caught sight of me, for he altered his course a little, and came straight on. Then I saw that it was Jimmy.

"Hello!" he said. "I saw you coming out this way. You don't mind if I sit down?"

"Of course not," I protested.

"I thought I'd like a little talk," he said, and sat down and filled his pipe, and for a moment smoked in silence, staring out across the sand.

"Tired?" I asked at last, by way of starting things.

"No—not so very. But it's hard on the women."

"Mlle. Roland seems to stand it all right," I remarked.

"Yes—I wasn't thinking of her. Thank heaven there's only one more day of it!"

"I rather like it," I said. "It's new and interesting. Listen to that, now!"

From the camp of the fellahin, a short distance away, came a low chanting, as though they were trying to sing themselves to sleep.

"I know," he assented; "but all the same, the more I think about it, the more foolish it seems to travel away out here into the middle of the desert in order to get a location. There must be dozens of places along the river which would have done just as well."

"Creel doesn't think so," I said. "He went all through the river locations."

"My own opinion is," said Jimmy, "that the man at the Metropolitan or Davis or somebody put one over on Creel in order to get some excavating done. Of course it will be a good location, but I'll bet it's not the only one by a long shot!"

"Well, I don't think we have anything to complain of," I said. "Davis seems to have made every possible provision for our comfort."

"Oh, he's done that," Jimmy agreed. "He knows his business."

"And the desert is wonderful."

Jimmy stirred uneasily.

"It's all of that," he agreed. "In fact, it's a little too wonderful!"

"What do you mean?" I asked, looking at him; and I saw that at last we had got to the subject he wanted to talk to me about. But for a moment longer he fought shy of it.

"There's something in the air—in the silence—in all this vast emptiness that gives me the jumps. I can't sleep. Every time I lie down, I have a sensation as though the sand was going to pour down on me and bury me. I seem to be suffocating."

"Oh, you'll get used to it," I said hopefully.

"I hope so. The sensation isn't pleasant. And I hope I won't see any more ghosts," he added.

"Ghosts!" I echoed, staring at him.

"Look here, Billy," he said, edging closer and lowering his voice, "I haven't breathed a word of this to anybody, and for a while I thought I wouldn't, but it's been worrying me, and at last I decided to tell you. Don't think me a fool."

"Go ahead," I said, as he stopped. "Let's hear about it."

"Last night," he went on slowly, "as I lay on my back, staring up at the sky, something came and stood beside me."

The chill in the air seemed suddenly to deepen. I shivered a little and snuggled closer into the sand.

"What was it?" I asked.

"I don't know what it was. I hadn't heard any sound, and I didn't know anything was there till its face came in between me and the stars."

"An Egyptian face?"

"I couldn't see; it seemed to be covered with a dark cloth or something."

"Sure you weren't dreaming?" I suggested.

"Yes. I wasn't sleepy. I was lying there with my eyes wide open. And suddenly that face peered down at me . . ."

He stopped, puffing moodily at his pipe.

"Go on," I said, at last. "What happened?"

"Nothing happened. It hung there for an instant looking down at me, and I could see its eyes glittering; and then it disappeared. I sat up and looked around, but it wasn't anywhere in sight. I couldn't understand that, either, for the moon made it as bright as day. There was the women's tent standing out white and clear on one side, and the empty desert on the other . . ."

He stopped as he saw the expression on my face.

"Could it have gone into the tent?" I asked.

"I thought of that, and sat there and listened. But the women slept right on. . . ."

I sat up and knocked out my pipe against the heel of my shoe.

"We must tell Davis at once," I said. "This is pretty serious."

"There's no use to alarm the women . . ."

"We'll not alarm them—they don't need to know. But we can't have any of the natives prowling around their tent."

"Yes," agreed Jimmy; "that's the only sensible explanation—but somehow it doesn't satisfy me. It didn't look like a native."

"You didn't see anything but the head," I pointed out, "and that was wrapped up just as a native's would have been."

"I know—but there was a perfume . . ."

He stopped abruptly and stared out across the sand.

"Go on," I said impatiently. "What sort of perfume?"

"You'll laugh at me, Billy," he said, "but I'll swear it was the odour of grave-clothes, of opened tombs . . ."

He stopped again, and I could see his lips trembling.

"Oh, come!" I protested. "What do you know about the odour of grave-clothes? You're letting your imagination run away with you. The natives have an odour . . ."

"Yes; I've noticed it. But it wasn't in the least like that!"

"Now, look here, Jimmy," I said, "you don't mean to tell me that you seriously believe this thing was a ghost?"

"No," he answered slowly, "I don't believe in ghosts—at least I didn't until last night. But anything seems possible here!"

"The dead are just as dead in Egypt as they are anywhere," I pointed out. "Your ghost was a native prowling around to see if he could steal something—or do some other mischief. Just get that firmly in your head, will you?"

"But where did he go?" Jimmy persisted, his voice a little shrill. "How could he disappear like that? If I'd seen him slinking away—but I didn't! There was nothing in sight—absolutely nothing—I stood up to make sure—I even walked around a little . . ."

"These natives are up to all sorts of tricks," I said. "He may have dropped behind a sand ridge—or he may have ducked under the tent. Come on—we'll tell Davis."

We found Davis, after some searching, sitting hunched up by himself, with his arms around his knees, staring away to the east, as though by concentration he hoped to see what was happening to his beloved ruins; and we sat down beside him, and I told him the story. He listened with close attention.

"It was undoubtedly one of the natives," he agreed, "though I have never known anything of the sort to happen before."

"You don't mean to say no Egyptian will steal?" I asked.

"Oh, no; they're no more honest than other people. But what good would it do to steal anything out here? If the thief tried to leave the caravan, he'd die in the desert; and if he didn't leave it, he'd be discovered as soon as anything was missed, for all the natives would be searched. They all know that."

"Then what was his object?"

"I don't know," and Davis pulled his white beard thoughtfully. "In fact, I'd say it wasn't a native at all, if there was any other possible explanation."

"Jimmy is inclined to think it was a ghost," I said jokingly. "He says it smelled of grave-clothes. Of course, he is a connoisseur of grave-clothes."

But Davis didn't appear amused. Instead, he looked at Jimmy quickly.

"What sort of odour was it?" he asked.

"I can't just describe it," said Jimmy, slowly; "a sort of musty, spicy smell—a smell I somehow associate with mummies—though I don't know that I ever smelled a mummy. They're always in tight glass cases—all I ever saw . . ."

His voice trailed away, and he left the sentence unfinished. Instead of laughing at him, as I expected, Davis sat silent, plucking at his beard, and staring at the horizon. And poor Jimmy, crouching there, filtering the sand nervously between his fingers, and hungering for a word of comfort—and not getting it! At last I could stand it no longer.

"You don't mean to say *you* think it was a ghost!" I protested impatiently.

"Oh, no," Davis answered quietly; but there was something in his voice—a sort of undercurrent—I had never noticed there before. "It was one of the natives without a doubt. But his object puzzles me."

"There are the women," I suggested.

But Davis shook his head decidedly.

"It had nothing to do with them," he said. "I know these Egyptians. But I'll see Mustafa."

As he started to rise, Jimmy caught his arm.

"We mustn't alarm the women," he said.

"I'll tell no one but Mustafa," Davis promised. "The whole thing had better be kept among us three."

He disappeared in the darkness in the direction of the camp. After a moment Jimmy rose wearily and brushed the sand from his trousers.

"I'm going to turn in," he said. "I'm dead tired. Are you coming?"

"No," I said; "I think I'll smoke another pipe."

"Good-night, then."

"Good-night," I answered, and watched him as he walked away.

Davis came back presently, and somewhat to my surprise, sat down beside me.

"I've spoken to Mustafa," he said; "he'll keep his eyes open. I don't think we'll be bothered again—unless it's a case of nerves."

"Jimmy was telling me that the silence and emptiness and all that was giving him the jumps," I said.

"I suspected it from the way he talked," nodded Davis. "I've seen just such cases before. Some

men can't stand the desert at all—they develop mania and get worse and worse as long as they stay in Egypt. With others it wears off in a few days. If he's bothered again, I'll give him a sedative."

"What was the use of coming away out here in the desert, anyway?" I asked. "Why couldn't we have stayed somewhere near the river?"

Davis straightened out his legs and cleared his throat, as though suddenly called upon to defend himself.

"The place we're going to," he said, "is, as I understand it, the exact background Mr. Creel wants for his picture. He'll not be disappointed—I can promise you that—and it has this further advantage, that he can rearrange things to suit himself—something he would never be permitted to do with any of the better-known places along the river. I'm going to help with the picture all I can. But I don't need to pretend to you—I don't pretend to anybody—that it's the picture which interests me most."

"What does interest you most?"

"The solution of the greatest riddle in Egyptian history," he answered, his voice suddenly hoarse with emotion. "Between the twelfth and the eighteenth dynasties there is a gap of five centuries on which we have scarcely a single ray of light. It was during those five centuries that Egypt was ruled by the so-called Hyksos, or shepherd-kings—Arabs, probably. The period extends roughly from twenty-two hundred to seventeen hundred years before Christ. And it was during that period, according to the Bible narrative, that the Children of Israel were in bondage here; that Joseph was over-lord at the court of Pharaoh; that the seven

years' famine occurred—and all the rest of it. If we can unearth the records of that period, we will prove or disprove the Bible story."

"And you expect to unearth them out here in the desert?" I asked incredulously.

"I think it possible," he answered gravely.

A quiver of excited awe swept through me. Here indeed was something big—something tremendous—something beside which our own business in the desert dwindled to ridiculous insignificance.

"But," I stammered; "but I don't see . . ."

"The records of those five hundred years," Davis explained, "even the names of the shepherd-kings, were destroyed by the native kings who came after them, who were determined that not a single memento should remain of that period of alien rule. The great Sphinx in the Louvre, the Bagdad lion, the sacrificial stone at Gizeh—all these were covered by the records of that period; and they were all chiselled away so carefully that scarcely a word is decipherable. Not a single inscription was left anywhere; and if any still exist, it must be in some remote place where they remained undiscovered . . ."

"But why out here?" I asked. "What makes you think . . ."

"I believe one of those kings was buried here," Davis answered. "If I can find his tomb—if it is still intact . . ."

He was combing his beard nervously again, and I suddenly discovered that the hand which held my pipe was trembling violently. Then Davis rose with a jerk.

"We must get some sleep," he said. "And I would ask you not to repeat anything of all this. It is a secret I don't share with everyone."

There was a note in his voice which told me that he was already wondering how he had come to share it with me !

I promised, of course, to say nothing ; and followed him to bed. But my head was whirling as I lay, wrapped in my blanket, staring up at the stars. What a tremendous business—to prove or disprove that splendid Bible story ! The thought shook me through and through. It was a long time before I could compose myself for sleep.

CHAPTER XII

WE were up at dawn and jogging eastward again—as it seemed to me we had been doing for days and days. We were all in better spirits—our moodiness had vanished—we were getting acclimated to the desert, I suppose; and for the first time since we started, there were jests and chaffing. It did me good to hear Ma Creel laugh again. It did us all good, for her laugh was infectious . . .

Jimmy had seen nothing more of his ghost, so he said, when I took occasion to inquire, and I concluded that Mustafa's police regulations, whatever they were, had had their effect. Jimmy seemed entirely recovered from his nervousness; he had slept well, he said, and he was quite ready to laugh at his fears of the night before.

"Though night *does* make a difference!" he added.

I joined Davis a little later, and told him of Jimmy's recovery; and then I tried to take up again our talk of the night before; but he refused to be drawn out. And then Mlle. Roland joined us, in the gayest of spirits, and rode along between us, asking Davis all sorts of questions about the desert and the oasis we were bound for.

It wasn't a real oasis, it seemed; a real oasis is

fed underground, in some mysterious way, from the waters of the Nile. This one was at the bottom of a broad basin into which was drained all the rain which fell for miles and miles around. Underneath it, so Davis hazarded, there was a natural reservoir, holding enough water to carry it over the dry seasons ; for there was a well in the centre of the oasis which always had water in it. The whole place was only a few acres in extent, though there were evidences that it had once been much larger—maintained, perhaps, by artificial irrigation ; but it was steadily shrinking before the ceaseless onslaughts of the desert, and would probably, some day, be wiped out altogether. The ruins which he had been excavating had once stood in the midst of vegetation, but now there was some three hundred yards of sand between them and the edge of the oasis. It was a graphic instance of the struggle which had been going on in Egypt ever since time began, and which had kept it a mere ribbon of a land in the midst of a trackless waste.

I hoped from the way Davis had loosened up under the charm of our companion that he would go ahead and tell us something of what he hoped to find in the ruins ; but perhaps my wish was too evident in my face, for he suddenly shut up like a clam, excused himself and urged his donkey forward to join Mustafa at the head of the column. He was so evidently anxious to get rid of us, that the girl and I couldn't help laughing as we met each other's eyes.

I had never seen her looking so beautiful. She had disdained a veil from the first, and sun and air had given the faintest tinge of bronze to her skin her full lips had taken on a deeper crimson ;

her whole face fairly glowed with some deep, mysterious well-being. She was vivid, radiant—and I told her so.

"It is just happiness," she explained. "For some reason, I am very, very happy. It is as though some great desire was about to be realized."

"What desire?" I asked.

"I do not know—I only know that within me there is a strange peace."

"At least you know what your great desire is!" I protested.

"I have never had a great desire—unless it was to be an actress—a really good one."

"Well," I began; but she shook her head.

"Oh, no; it is not that! I am certain it has nothing to do with that! Most probably, it is nothing at all—nothing but the wonder of all this."

She looked out eastward across the sand to where, faint against the horizon, the serrated peaks of a range of rugged hills could just be discerned.

"Professor Davis says that the Red Sea lies beyond those hills," she added. "But you will notice that we are turning more to the south."

"Has Davis been talking to you?" I asked in some surprise.

"Oh, I did most of the talking; but when he gets started, he is most interesting."

"Has he told you . . ."

I stopped, remembering my promise.

"That he hopes to make a great find? Yes. It seems there is a king's tomb somewhere among those ruins."

"He's only guessing," I said; "but if he guesses right, it will be a tremendous thing for him."

"If he finds the tomb," she added, "perhaps we

shall see the ghost of that old king ! Their ghosts are supposed to live in their tombs, you know."

I laughed as I glanced at her, for I supposed that she was jesting ; but I was astonished to see that her face was very serious.

" You're not in earnest ! " I protested.

" Certainly I am in earnest ! "

" Do you really believe in ghosts ? "

" I have always believed in ghosts."

" Have you ever seen one ? "

" No—not yet ! "

" Then you ought to talk to Jimmy Allen," I began, and stopped suddenly, remembering that the women were not to be alarmed. I have to confess that Mlle. Roland did not seem in the least alarmed.

" Has *he* seen a ghost ? " she inquired tranquilly.

" He thought he saw one night before last . . . "

I stopped again, for the expression of her face had suddenly changed. The glow had left it—it was almost sallow—and there was something like fear in the eyes that looked at me.

" Go on ! " she commanded. " Tell me ! "

" I shouldn't have said anything about it ! It wasn't a ghost, of course. One of the natives was wandering about the place, and Jimmy saw him—that was all."

She breathed a quick sigh of relief.

" I thought you were going to tell me something exciting," she said. " But most ghost stories turn out like that ! "

" All of them," I said positively, and we dropped the subject.

Then Jimmy Allen rode up, and I had another shock.

I have already told of the impression she gave me

of holding Jimmy at a distance ; and I had had the feeling that he was beating vainly against a wall of ice. But the wall had vanished. The eyes she turned upon him were much more than friendly. She had never greeted me with such a smile. What had been going on, I wondered ? Had they reached an understanding . . .

And then I saw that it was as much a surprise to Jimmy as to me ; for he turned pale and then red, and clutched his saddle as though he feared to fall.

And suddenly I felt like an intruder, and reined my donkey in and fell back with the others.

But at least I could look at them—at the way their donkeys drew together, at the turn of their heads, the inclination of their bodies.

“ Jimmy seems to be getting on ! ” said a low voice at my elbow, and I turned to find that Mollie had ridden up beside me.

“ Yes,” I agreed ; “ and I don’t understand it.”

“ What don’t you understand ? ” she demanded sharply.

“ She has always seemed to dislike him—and here, quite suddenly . . . ”

“ She makes eyes at him,” said Mollie. “ There is nothing surprising in that. Jimmy is a very handsome fellow.”

“ Too handsome to live with,” I amended. “ I prefer the rugged type of countenance.”

“ Like your own ! ” she mocked.

“ Well, yes,” I said. “ Why shouldn’t I admit it ? ”

“ Most people would call it just ugly,” she remarked, looking at it impersonally.

I hadn't deserved that, but I managed to bear up. It was far better to be knocked about than to be ignored. I drew a little nearer.

"At least it has a chin," I said; "which is more than can be said of some."

"What do you mean by that?" she demanded.

"I was thinking of certain long-nosed, close-eyed, narrow-headed idiots in uniform," I explained. "And I was thinking of the miles and miles I've seen you walk beside them; and the hours and hours you've leaned over the rail with them. How could you do it, Mollie?"

"You were pretty fully occupied yourself," snapped Mollie, with a show of temper which surprised me. "I didn't know you had time to look at me!"

Which reminded me to look again at Mlle. Roland; and I saw with astonishment that she and Jimmy were riding quite a distance apart and both were sitting very stiff; and just then Mlle. Roland reined in her donkey, turned him sharply, and passed us with a frigid little smile; while Jimmy rode on alone, his shoulders drooping dejectedly.

Mollie leaned over to me, her eyes snapping.

"She's a cat!" she hissed. "And you defend her! You have the nerve to defend her!"

And without waiting for me to answer—though, indeed, I was quite incapable of answering!—she wheeled her donkey and joined Ma Creel, who had entrusted the guidance of her donkey to a boy, and was jogging placidly along under a white umbrella, the only real philosopher in the lot of us!

I rode on, divided between disgust and bewilderment. I hadn't defended Mlle. Roland—I had never suspected that she needed defending! Even yet I couldn't see that she did; but in any event,

she was thoroughly competent to take care of herself. The only thing I was sure of was that Mollie had dug up the hatchet again.

I found myself looking at Jimmy's dejected figure with a sort of fellow-feeling, and I joined him presently, thinking that perhaps we might console each other; but there was no hint of welcome in the look he turned upon me, and he didn't even take the trouble to listen to my remarks. But that evening, he was a little more communicative—to the extent, at least, of repeating certain well-worn aphorisms. We had somehow gravitated together for a smoke after dinner.

"Davis says we'll get there to-night," I said.

"Get where?" he asked, waking out of a sort of dream.

"Where we're going, of course!" I snapped, my own nerves being considerably frazzled.

"I beg your pardon, Billy," he said. "I wasn't listening. It's an oasis, isn't it?"

"You don't need to make conversation for my sake," I said.

"But I really want to know," he persisted. "*Isn't* it an oasis?"

"Davis says it isn't a true oasis," and I repeated what he had told us. "It does rain sometimes out here, so Davis says," I added; "sort of laps over from the Red Sea."

"One would never think it," said Jimmy, looking absently out over the sand. And then he startled me by adding, "Women are hell!"

"Well," I said cautiously, "my experience hasn't been great—but so far as it goes, they are."

"First they blow hot—then they blow cold."

"My experience has been principally on the cold

side," I said. "Yours, so far as I have observed it, has been the other way."

"They make me sick!" he said. "I thought I knew them!"

"And now when you find you don't, you're sicker still!" I said.

"What do you mean by that?" he demanded, and glared at me.

"Oh, what's the use of trying to bluff me?" I asked. "I can see what ails you—anybody could!"

"My God!" he groaned. "Is it as plain as that?"

"Oh, come!" I said. "We're not making a film! Besides, it's nothing to be ashamed of. Everybody knows I'm in love with Mollie Adams and that she won't look at me . . ."

And then, to my amazement, Jimmy suddenly forgot his troubles and turned over on his back and laughed and laughed.

"I'm glad it amuses you!" I snorted; and that seemed to set him off again; and just then Mustafa gave the signal to start.

I tried to find out, later on, what it really was that had set him off like that; but he just rode along without looking at me. For blowing hot, then cold, a woman is nowhere with an Irishman!

I found out, eventually, that nobody wanted to talk to me. I endeavoured to have an explanation with Mollie, but she treated me like a leper; Creel, his brows furrowed in thought, waved me impatiently away; Davis was so excited by the prospect of beginning work on the morrow that he didn't even pretend to listen; Digby and Ma Creel, riding side by side, were reminiscencing again; and finally

I was astounded to see Mollie rein in beside Mlle. Roland, and engage in an apparently intimate and engrossing conversation.

So I fell gradually to the rear, and let my donkey jog along any way he pleased, and reflected upon the inconsistencies of human nature. Now *I* was not subject to such ups and downs. You would find me to-morrow just where I was to-day. I didn't like people one day and hate them the next ; I didn't call people cats and then take them to my bosom the next moment ! I didn't . . .

Suddenly an excited clatter broke out among the natives, and I looked up to see a bunch of ghostly palms faintly outlined against the sky. We had reached the oasis.

CHAPTER XIII

IT was not until next morning that I was able to get any but the vaguest idea of the spot of earth which was to be the theatre of our drama. Then it didn't take me long to discover that the photographs hadn't begun to do it justice. It was, as Davis had said, only a few acres in extent, roughly circular in shape, with picturesque clumps of date-palms and thorny acacias scattered about it, and a thick growth of coarse grass striving to hold back the desert sand. One had only to look at it—a pigmy pitted against a giant—to realize how hopeless the struggle was!

In the middle of the oasis, at its lowest point, was the well—a tiny circular pool of clear water—over which Mustafa set a guard at once to make sure that the water was not by any chance wasted or defiled. I tasted it and was surprised to find that it was quite cool.

Three hundred yards away to the east, with the marbled sand stretching all about them, a series of mounds marked the ruins where Davis hoped to make his great discovery. Looking out at them, it seemed hardly possible that they had once stood in the midst of palms and flowers.

Davis and Mustafa, after considerable talk, agreed

on the details of our permanent camp ; and then Davis, at the head of a gang of men, hurried away to the ruins, while Mustafa, at the head of another, got the ground ready and put up the tents. When they were all in place, they made quite a little settlement. The two sleeping-tents were placed side by side, some eight or ten feet apart, and in front of them the dining- and lounging-tent was pitched. A little to one side, the cook set up his sheet-iron stove, while farther to the left was the tent for properties and supplies. The native camp was on the other side of the oasis, hidden from sight by a swell of ground. The only tent there was a small one marking Mustafa's headquarters. About it the camels and donkeys and goats were picketed in picturesque confusion.

Ma Creel and old Digby went to work at once unpacking the properties and sorting them out, while Creel hurried away to select his locations. I unpacked my cameras and assured myself that they were all right ; then I loaded one of them with a small cartridge, for I wanted to test the light. I had an idea that in this dry atmosphere it would prove much more intense than any I had ever worked with. As I came out of the tent, with the camera on my shoulder, I met Jimmy. He was not looking happy.

"What's the matter?" I asked. "Blowing cold this morning?"

He grunted disgustedly.

"Where *are* the girls?"

"They are fitting up their new home. They said they didn't need any help, and shooed me away. What are you up to?"

"I'm going to try out a bit of film. I thought

I'd go over to the ruins and shoot the professor. Have you been over there? Come along, then."

Five minutes later, we were toiling across the sand toward the low mounds, about which we could see the labourers swarming—for Davis hadn't lost any time putting them to work, when he found that Creel didn't need them—but it was not until we got quite near that we realized the extent of Davis's operations. When I saw the great gashes he had cut in the earth, I began to have a new respect for the man. It was like excavating the Panama Canal! And what a background for our picture!

He saw us coming and hurried out to meet us, his face red and shining with excitement. And I noticed for the first time that he had a pistol in a holster at his belt.

"What's that for?" I asked. "To keep the natives in order?"

"Oh, no," he laughed; "Mustafa attends to that. We shot an ape when we were here before—he got to stealing everything he could lay his hands on—and I thought perhaps his mate might still be prowling about. But I've seen no signs of her, so I guess she cleared out."

"And how are the ruins?"

"Everything's in splendid shape," he answered, triumphantly; "better than I ever dared to hope. The sand has drifted very little. There's some clearing up to do, and then I can go ahead from right where I left off."

"Great Scott!" I said, for we had come to the top of a mound from the farther edge of which a mighty chasm stretched below us. "Do you mean to say you dug all that out?"

"Yes—the sand had drifted ten feet above it. I worked here nearly a year."

I could well believe it. The excavation extended from side to side of what seemed a sort of court, through the centre of which ran a row of queerly twisted columns, only a few of which were still upright. The court was surrounded by walls of greyish-white stone, which were only partly uncovered—or perhaps the sand had drifted over them again during the months that Davis had been away. It was at this sand the labourers were working, filling their baskets, hoisting them with a quick swing to the shoulder, and toiling up out of the excavation by what seemed a double stair, for the returning labourers, their baskets empty, were descending at the same time. I walked over to it and found that it *was* a double stair, with an inclined plane between the two flights of steps. And then I remembered that I had seen it in one of the photographs.

"Why the inclined plane?" I questioned.

"Tomb entrances were always built that way," Davis explained, "so the great stone coffins could be got up and down."

"But how did you ever know where to begin?" I asked, looking about at the stretch of tumbled mounds.

"Oh, I probed about until I found the staircase. Those are my exploratory ditches out yonder," and he pointed to the great gashes we had seen first. "When I found the stairs, I knew I was at the starting-point. What's the matter with Allen?" he asked suddenly.

I turned quickly to find that Jimmy had sunk down on a mound of sand and was holding his head

in his hands as though he feared it might burst. There was something in his attitude—so lax, so abandoned—that sent a thrill of fear through me.

“What’s the matter, Jimmy?” I cried, running toward him. “You’re not ill?”

He looked up at me with a sort of haggard stare; his face was livid, with great drops of sweat standing out across the forehead.

“I don’t know what’s the matter,” he muttered huskily. “My head’s whirling . . .”

“It’s the sun,” said Davis, who had hurried up. “You’ll have to be careful till you get used to it. I’ll have a couple of my men help you back to the tents. You’d better lie down for a while.”

But Jimmy was already better. He straightened up and wiped away the sweat, and a little colour came back into his cheeks.

“I’ll be all right in a minute,” he protested, and rose shakily. “I can’t imagine what came over me!”

He was staring down into the excavation as though it fascinated him.

“It’s the sun,” Davis repeated; “one doesn’t realize how hot it is. I’ve seen a lot of men taken just the same way. You go back and lie down.”

“I believe I will,” said Jimmy, tearing his eyes away from the excavation by a visible effort and turning toward the oasis.

“You’re sure you don’t need my help?” I asked.

“Oh, no; I’m all right,” and he clambered slowly down the mound.

We followed him with our eyes, and I, at least, was very anxious; but in a moment his shoulders straightened and his pace quickened.

“He’ll be all right with a little rest,” said Davis;

"but he'll have to be careful not to over-do it, or he'll have a regular stroke. It's evident he can't stand the sun. Were you going to take a picture?" and he nodded toward the camera.

"I was going to try out the light," I said.

"Can I be of any help?"

"Oh, no, thanks. Don't let me bother you."

"If you need me, just whistle," he said, and sprang down the steps three at a time.

I ran through a few feet of film with various apertures, and then descended into the excavation and did the same thing there. Then I sat down and watched the men working, and presently Creel appeared at the top of the mound, and came down the steps and joined me. His face was radiant.

"It's great!" he said. "I wasn't looking for anything half so good. We'll start this afternoon."

"I've been testing out the light," I said. "I don't want to over-expose."

"You'd better develop the film right away. I'll be ready for you by three o'clock."

"You'll have to be careful how you work Jimmy Allen," I said. "He had a little heat-stroke a while ago."

"The deuce he did!" said Creel, and the light went out of his face. "You don't mean to say he's sick!"

"No; but Davis says he will be if he over-does it."

Creel took off his helmet and ran his fingers through his hair.

"We can't have anything like that happen!" he said. "That would be awful."

"It isn't so bad as that," I assured him. "Jimmy will be all right, I guess. Anyway, he'll work as long as he's able to move."

"Yes," Creel agreed, "Jimmy's no quitter. I'll shield him as much as I can," and he walked over to Davis to arrange the work for the afternoon, while I went back to the supply-tent, and in a dark corner I had rigged up for myself, developed my scraps of film.

As I had expected, the ordinary aperture was far too large for the brilliant desert light; even at the bottom of the excavation, a shade smaller size gave the better film—which was all to the good, because, of course, with the smaller aperture I got a cleaner picture with more brilliant definition. If the film was a failure, I told myself, it wouldn't be the fault of the photography. In fact, the photography ought to go a long way toward saving it, however bad it was. And it wouldn't be the first time the cameraman had proved more important than the director!

Creel had decided to start with some caravan scenes, and Jimmy donned the very becoming khaki suit which was to be his costume as an explorer and excavator; though Davis remarked cynically that he had never seen a real Egyptologist in such a rig. Creel got into a similar but less striking suit, for he was to be Jimmy's companion and assistant—a sort of chorus, as it were; the camels and donkeys and goats and natives were mustered in; Mustafa donned an unusually voluminous burnous; and we ploughed out into the sand, and I took a string of pictures—first of the caravan in the full desert, and then with the oasis in the background; and then I panned right up to its edge, with the camels disappearing among the palms.

After that there was a hundred feet or so of the camp, with Creel and Jimmy sitting at the table examining maps of the ruins, and eating dinner,

and discussing plans, and so on. Then the whole lot of them dived indoors to change their costumes, while Digby and Mustafa brought out a lot of trappings for the camels; and then Digby went in to change *his* costume, and Mustafa and the astonished natives adjusted the trappings, the camels protesting lustily, for they couldn't in the least understand what was going on.

Presently old Digby came out again in full war-paint as a priest of ancient Egypt. Mustafa had quite a time preventing the natives from bolting; but after he had harangued them for a long time, they seemed to understand and quieted down. Then Mustafa picked out a dozen of the most striking of them, and made them stand still while he and Digby dressed them as ancient warriors. Mustafa himself was to be prime minister or something, and when he got into his togs he certainly looked the part. Ma Creel and Mollie, as the attendants of the king's favourite, were not so convincing, and Creel sent them back to put on another layer of bronze.

"I ought to have brought along some native girls," he said; "but I probably couldn't have made them act! And they've got to do considerable acting. Isn't Mustafa gorgeous?"

And just then Jimmy came out, and I heard the gasp which ran around the group of natives when they saw him. Indeed, I gasped myself, for if anybody ever looked like a king of ancient Egypt—at least, as I imagine they looked, and as they should have looked, whether they did or not!—it was Jimmy Allen. He struck an attitude in front of the tent, and I saw the natives shaking; but Mustafa spoke to them sharply, and then Jimmy grinned and came

forward. The grin broke the spell, for there was nothing Egyptian about it. It was pure Irish.

"Great, Jimmy!" said Creel. "Couldn't be better. Only, for heaven's sake, don't smile!" Then his wife and Mollie came out again and presented themselves for inspection. "You'll do," he said, looking them over critically. "But stay in profile as much as you can. Where is Mlle. Roland?"

"Coming!" cried a clear voice, and she stepped out from the tent.

For an instant there was silence. Then, with an inarticulate cry of fear and stupefaction, the natives dropped to their knees as one man and touched their foreheads to the ground. I could see Mustafa staring with open mouth; I saw Jimmy, after one long look, sink slowly to one knee; I felt my own legs shaking . . .

For there before our eyes was something more than an embodiment of ancient Egypt—it was ancient Egypt itself, its very spirit, risen from the dead in amazing resurrection! It wasn't through the eyes alone I sensed it—it was through some instinct far more subtle and convincing. There was an aura—a perfume—an exhalation as of grave-clothes and opened tombs . . .

CHAPTER XIV

IT passed in an instant—that sense of strain and weirdness and unreality. It was Mlle. Roland herself who broke the spell.

“Will I do?” she asked, and swept a beaming glance round upon us.

Jimmy got hastily to his feet, and I dare say he was blushing under his make-up. But it was Creel who first regained the power of speech.

“Do!” he echoed. “Why, you’re the real thing! Just look at those natives!”

At the sound of her voice, the prostrate fellahin had looked up dazedly; but they did not rise from their knees. They crouched there, staring stupidly, with wide-open mouths, as though not knowing whether to believe their eyes or their ears. Their eyes told them that they were in the presence of a veritable princess of ancient Egypt—yes, and perhaps some more subtle sense confirmed it; while their ears bore evidence that it was only one of the company of mad foreigners, whose strange actions passed all comprehension.

But Mustafa, who had recovered in a moment, spoke to them sharply, telling them, I suppose, not to be fools, and they got slowly to their feet. Creel watched them regretfully.

"Too bad we didn't have the camera ready when they went down like that," he said. "We can never get them to do it again!"

"Oh, yes, you can!" broke in Davis, who was combing his beard feverishly with his fingers. "All you need is a sceptre. Maybe we'll find one before we get through with these excavations."

He had never taken his eyes from the girl since the instant of her appearance, and I had never before seen him so excited.

"I hope we do," said Creel. "Now let's get busy. Bring up the camels, Mustafa."

"Vurry good, saar," and Mustafa sprang to obey.

Five of the caparisoned camels were brought up and, by impassioned objurgation and jerks and kicks, compelled to kneel. Seeing what a job it is, I don't blame a camel for not wanting to kneel!

"This one is yours, Princess," said Creel, indicating the most gorgeous beast and giving Mlle. Roland the title which we all instantly felt to be appropriate. "We'll help you up."

She came forward smiling; but she didn't need any help—at least not Creel's; for she turned to Jimmy and held out her hand with a gesture truly regal; and he sprang forward and caught the hand, and supported her as she stepped up into the awkward seat as easily and gracefully as though she had done it a thousand times!

"Wait!" roared Creel. "We must have that! Billy, bring up your box—put it right here. Get down again, Princess!" He took a rapid survey of the scene to be sure everything was all right and that there would be no false note—trust Creel for seeing all that at a glance! "Bring those warriors up a little closer, Mustafa; put the rest of the natives

back under those palms; now you two women stand over here. Digby, get there by the camel's head. A little more to the right, Jimmy. As the Princess comes forward, you will all bow—slowly, like this! Get out of range, Professor—we can't have you in this! Now let's try it! Splendid! Are you ready, Billy?"

"All ready," I said.

"All right! Now, Princess! Now, Billy!"

She came forward regally, with eyes only for the King—for Jimmy—and heaven knows, his eyes were only for her!—and gave him her hand. It thrilled me to see how the natives bowed before her—no acting about that. And with a single graceful motion, she stepped up into the seat.

"Hold her hand an instant, Jimmy, as though you couldn't let it go," Creel commanded; but Jimmy didn't need to be told—he had the actor's instinct for such things! "Now let it go—make the camel get up, Mustafa—lead him off, Digby—that's right. Now get on your camel, Jimmy! That's it! Splendid!" for Jimmy had stepped into his seat with simple dignity. "Off you go! Now you two women on the next ones—oh, my God, no! Stop, Billy, stop!" for Mollie and Ma Creel were floundering desperately in their efforts to reach their seats. "We'll have to cut just when they turn toward their camels," he said to me. "What's the matter with you two lobsters, anyway?"

"Seeing that this is the first time I ever rode a camel," retorted Ma Creel, "I don't know what else you could expect! Oh—oh!" she screamed, for the camel had begun to rise, tossing like a boat in a stormy sea. Mollie didn't scream; she just clenched her teeth and hung on for dear life—she hadn't

served her apprenticeship as a movie actress for nothing ! But it wasn't till I saw how awkward they were that I realized the finish of the performance which Jimmy and the Princess had given us !

"It's the first time for all of us," said Creel, and I wondered if he realized how remarkable it was ; "but all right—you're up now ! Come along, Billy," and he led the way under the palms and out into the desert.

To walk through red-hot sand up to your ankles, with a heavy camera over your shoulder, and a burning sun blazing down upon you, isn't exactly a pleasant job ; but I never thought of it, I was so uplifted and excited, as I toiled along after Creel. I could see that he was excited and uplifted, too, and didn't feel the sun or mind the sand any more than I did ! Verily, enthusiasm is a mighty thing !

Well, we got some scenes of the caparisoned caravan out in the desert, and then approaching the oasis from the same point that the other caravan had, so the audience would at once spot the fact that it was the same place. And when that was done, Creel dismissed the players.

"I'll want you in the morning early, Jimmy," he said, "in your khaki. I don't think I'll need you, Princess, until afternoon. Put your box away, Billy, and come with me—we've got a lot of work to do yet. I'll want four of your natives, Mustafa."

"Vurry good, saar," said Mustafa, who was divesting himself of his gorgeous raiment with evident regret, while Digby and Ma Creel, still in costume, checked up the trappings which had been worn by the camels and their natives.

It developed that what Creel wanted the four natives for was to carry the fake papier-mâché coffin

containing the fake papier-mâché mummy over to the ruins, and when we got there, we found that Davis had already put to work all the rest of the natives and that the debris was pretty well cleared away.

"We'll be ready to start real work in the morning," he said, coming forward when he saw us, and I noticed that he had discarded his pistol. Then he saw the men with the coffin. "What the deuce is that?" he asked.

"That's a mummy," said Creel. "We've got to plant it somewhere so that Jimmy can dig it out in the morning. We'll tear out a piece of that wall, and put the coffin behind it, and then put the wall up again."

"My dear sir," Davis objected, "a coffin like that would be found only in a regular tomb, and protected by a sarcophagus. Why, it's a royal coffin!" he added, taking a closer look at it.

"It's a copy of one in the Met.," Creel explained.

"But to suppose that it would be stuck anywhere behind a wall . . ."

"Its occupant was only a slave girl," Creel explained.

"Then there wouldn't be any coffin. Coffins weren't wasted on slaves."

"Oh, there's got to be a coffin!" said Creel. "Nobody ever heard of digging up a mummy without a coffin!"

"But any Egyptologist will tell you . . ."

"We'll have to do without the Egyptologists," said Creel cheerfully. "I don't imagine there are over a dozen or so in America—not enough to affect our receipts. Carry it down into the hole, boys."

They didn't understand the words, but they did

the gesture, and they lugged the coffin down the double staircase, and set it down at the bottom of the excavation. Davis followed, combing his beard uneasily.

"See here, Creel," he said, "if you'll wait a few days, maybe I'll find a tomb for you, with a real mummy."

"We can't take the chance," said Creel. "In motion pictures, you've got to know just what you're going to find before you start to find it—also just how long it will take. There's the footage to consider. I want to do this job in about two hundred feet—that is to say, three minutes. Besides, a real mummy wouldn't do. It's too fragile. This one is built to stand a lot of handling."

"Let's take a look at it," said Davis.

"Sure," assented Creel, and raised the lid proudly.

The natives, who had been standing curiously about, took one look at what lay inside the coffin, and then, with a whoop of terror, raced up the steps and out of sight.

"What the deuce is the matter with those fellows?" Creel demanded, staring after them. "One would think they had seen mummies enough . . ."

Davis, who had been gazing down at the weird figure and combing his beard excitedly, broke in with a laugh.

"Why, it's the Flinders mummy!" he said.

"Flinders?" questioned Creel. "That doesn't sound like an Egyptian name."

"It's the name of the man who found it—at Nebesheh. It was never in a coffin. It had been buried alive."

Creel stared at him an instant with shining eyes; then he struck his thigh a ringing blow.

"Buried alive!" he cried. "Whoopee! Professor, you've given me the one word I needed! I've got the story now! Oh, gorgeous, gorgeous!"

It was Davis's turn to stare.

"I don't get you," he said.

"There was one weak point in the story," Creel explained, more and more elated, "and it bothered me. But buried alive! It's perfect—it's consummate! It rivets the whole thing together into a water-tight, unsinkable bit of logic! But come on—let's get to work. We'll put it behind the wall without any coffin—I hope the Egyptologists will be pleased, Professor—they ought to give us some testimonials! We can get the buried-alive idea across in an insert—no, by George, we'll show it. We'll show the Princess being buried alive by her ruthless lover!" He looked around the excavation and saw that it was empty. "Get those natives back here, Mustafa, and set 'em to work on that wall."

"I am feared, saar," said Mustafa slowly, "dat perhaps they will not."

I looked at Mustafa and saw that he himself was plainly disturbed and uneasy.

"Why not?" demanded Creel.

"It iss what iss called *mamnua*—forbidden—unclean," explained Mustafa, with a gesture toward the coffin.

"Why, man," said Creel, and jerked the figure upright by one arm, "it isn't really a mummy—it's just a lot of papier-mâché. Come here and feel it."

Mustafa obliged unwillingly, but the instant he touched the figure his face cleared.

"I understand, saar," he said. "I bring dem," and he hurried up the steps.

Davis, too, had felt inquiringly of the mummy.

"A clever piece of work," he commented.

"Isn't it!" agreed Creel proudly. "But let me get the dope about this burying-alive business. Was it often done?"

"It was the usual punishment for certain crimes," said Davis. "This woman probably committed blasphemy—desecrated an altar, or something like that. That is the reason mummies of this sort are considered unclean; and the superstition comes down even to the modern Egyptians, as you have seen. Besides, it isn't a real mummy—it hasn't been eviscerated or wrapped. It's just a dried-up human body."

"I see," said Creel. "A king might inflict such a punishment upon a favourite whom he had tired of, or had grown to hate?"

"Yes, I suppose so. A king could do about anything he pleased in those days."

"And his conscience might trouble him about it afterwards?"

"No—I don't think a little thing like that would trouble a king of ancient Egypt. Besides, if the punishment was deserved . . ."

"But suppose he found out it wasn't?"

"He might regret his haste. I doubt if he would go farther than that!"

"My king did," said Creel positively. "You see he was an unusually enlightened and conscientious monarch, far ahead of his age. It got to weighing on his mind; and finally, as a kind of penance, he had himself buried out here in the desert beside the place where he had walled up the woman—we can use the mummy-case for him! And then, four thousand years later, reincarnated as a young and handsome Egyptologist . . ."

"There aren't any young and handsome Egyptologists," objected Davis. "They're all old, dried-up cranks like me!"

"Yes—there is one," said Creel, "and his name is Jimmy Allen—and some mysterious influence draws him to this spot—and he digs up the mummy of his four-thousand-years-old love . . ."

"And of course recognizes her at a glance!" scoffed Davis.

"No!" yelled Creel. "But she recognizes him! Gorgeous! Gorgeous!"

And just then Mustafa came back with the natives, and Creel refused to tell us any more. But Davis confided his opinion to me in a brief aside.

"He's crazy!" he said.

I confess I didn't see myself how a mummy that had been dead four thousand years could recognize anybody; but my faith in Creel was absolute, and I knew that in some way he would put it over!

CHAPTER XV

MUSTAFA, with vociferous argument, brought his men up to the coffin and demonstrated to them that the mummy was a fake by the simple expedient of making each one of them take hold of it. Once convinced that they had nothing to fear, they went cheerfully to work tearing down a section of the wall which closed in one side of the court. It was merely a rough retaining wall, built of squared blocks of white limestone, fitted together without mortar, and it didn't take long to make a hole in it. Then an excavation was scooped in the sand behind it, some stones piled up to keep it from caving in, the mummy stowed away between them, and the wall carefully replaced. Then a lot of debris was piled in front of it and covered deep with sand, and Creel finally expressed himself as satisfied.

"That's all right," he said. "We'll get some stuff in the morning that will make people sit up. Give your men something extra to eat to-night, Mustafa—they've done well to-day."

"Vurry good, saar," agreed Mustafa. "Perhaps a little tobacco, also?"

"Yes—a little tobacco, also," Creel assented. "Come along, you fellows," he added to Davis and

me. "I'm as hungry as a bear! By George, it's nearly dark!"

Davis looked up at the sky and then at his watch.

"The sun hasn't set yet," he said.

He and Mustafa glanced at each other, then, by a common impulse, they turned and hurried up the stair. The natives streamed up behind them, chattering uneasily. As they came out above the excavation, I saw a sudden blast of wind catch their cloaks and whip them about.

"What in blazes is the matter now?" asked Creel, staring after them. Then he looked down at the mummy-case. "I was going to have this carried back to the tent, but I guess it will be safe here."

"Yes," I agreed. "I don't know who'd touch it."

"Come on, then," said Creel. "Let's find out what the trouble is," and he started up the stair.

As we reached the top, a savage blast of wind whirled a sheet of sand into our eyes; and then we saw Davis and Mustafa standing on the highest mound, clinging to their clothing and staring away toward the south. We scrambled up beside them, half-blinded by the flying sand, and found them looking at a blue-black cloud—a most peculiar-looking cloud, for it reached right down to the earth, and whirled and eddied and swayed from side to side in the most terrifying way.

"What is it?" gasped Creel, after a moment.

"It's a sand-storm," Davis explained. "We're getting just the edge of it—the centre's going south of us. Good thing, too. I'd have had all that excavating to do over again!" and after another look to assure himself that the danger was past, he started down the mound.

Creel and I paused a moment to watch the cloud. It was travelling rapidly away toward the south, and its eddies and gusts and serpentine twinings were horrifyingly fascinating.

"Lord, if we could get a close-up of that!" said Creel, at last. "I guess there wouldn't have been much left of this outfit if it had passed over us," he added, as we turned to scramble down.

We found the rest of the party gathered at the edge of the trees watching the cloud, and it was rather a subdued crowd which sat down to dinner half an hour later. We felt a good deal as the passengers must feel on a ship which has just shaved past an iceberg.

It may have been that this sense of peril escaped moved Mollie to an unaccustomed tenderness; at any rate, when dinner was over and I got out my pipe, I chanced to meet her eyes; and a moment later, without knowing how it happened, I found myself walking away with her through a little group of palms. We walked on, without saying anything that I remember, until we came to the edge of the oasis; and then I sat down and lighted up, and she sat down beside me.

The night was like a piece of purple velvet; the air was soft and balmy as a baby's breath; the stars were more brilliant than I had ever seen them. I leaned back against a hummock of sand and drew a long breath of sheer contentment.

"What's the matter?" Mollie asked.

"Nothing," I answered. "That's just it! I'm perfectly happy and contented. Aren't you?"

She did not answer for a moment, and I turned and looked at her. Her face was only a blur in the darkness; but I knew somehow that there were

tears in her eyes. I moved closer, and reached out and took her hand—and she let me! Then I knew there was something wrong!

“Billy,” she said in a low voice, “I’m worried.”

“What about?” I asked.

“I don’t know. There’s just something that weighs on me. A feeling that something awful is going to happen.”

“Oh, come!” I protested, and ventured to hold her hand a little tighter. “You aren’t one to have the megrims, Mollie! *What’s* going to happen?”

“I don’t know,” she said again, and brushed her free hand in front of her eyes. Then she turned to me quickly. “I don’t like that Roland woman,” she said. “There’s something about her that’s—that’s not right—something queer . . .”

“It’s just temperament,” I protested. “The French are like that—so I’ve heard. If she wasn’t, she wouldn’t be normal.”

But Mollie shook her head.

“It isn’t that,” she said. “I know temperament when I see it. Great heavens! I’ve been an actress long enough! But she’s—different!”

“Yes, she’s different,” I agreed. “That’s what makes her interesting.”

“Oh,” said Mollie sharply, and drew her hand away; “so you find her interesting!”

“Yes, I do,” I said, boldly. “Most things different are interesting. Besides, I haven’t had anything else to interest myself in since this trip started. I had sort of hoped I might see something of you; but not having a uniform . . .”

“Don’t talk nonsense, Billy!” she snapped.

“It isn’t nonsense. I’m in deadly earnest.

When I think how many hours you've spent beside one uniform or another since we left New York . . ."

"Oh, those!" cried Mollie, and tossed her head. "I was just amusing myself!"

"Well, you weren't amusing *me*!" I retorted.

"I didn't know it was part of my job to amuse you," said Mollie. "Anyway, you didn't lack for amusement after the Roland arrived!"

"I was so lonesome," I admitted. "She seemed to like me."

"And the shamelessness of her!" Mollie panted on. "Those uniforms, as you call them, were crazy to meet her—silly fools! And I tried to arrange it! And she turned me down! Said you were quite enough for her!"

"Did she?" I said grimly. "That's the first I knew of it—but I admire her good taste!"

Mollie half-started to her feet; then she dropped back again into the sand, and, to my utter stupefaction, put her head in her hands and began to sob.

"Oh, look here, Mollie," I cried, and tried to take one of her hands again, "I didn't mean anything,—really I didn't! I take it all back! I agree with you about Mlle. Roland—there *is* something queer about her! All the interest I ever took in her was—well—detached, you know. And I don't think she ever had any special interest in me. In fact," I went on, with a burst of inspiration, "I shouldn't be surprised if she took me on just to torment you . . ."

"How would it torment me?" Mollie demanded, looking at me with a steely eye.

"I don't know," I stammered; "but Creel was

blabbing around about my being in love with some girl—I could have killed him ! ”

“ So could I ! ” said Mollie.

“ Anyway,” I concluded, “ it’s evident that she’s lost whatever sort of interest she ever had in me ! ”

“ She’s a cat ! ” snapped Mollie, as though she resented Mlle. Roland’s indifference even more than her interest.

“ No, she’s not,” I protested. “ Let’s be fair to her. She liked me well enough at first—perhaps still does ; but she’s got something else to think about. I fancy she’s growing fond of Jimmy—she certainly acts as though she were.”

Mollie turned and stared at me in speechless astonishment.

“ Blowing hot and cold, you know,” I explained. “ That’s the way girls do, isn’t it ? ”

“ Not nice girls,” said Mollie. “ They don’t torture people.”

“ Oh, *don’t* they ! ” I commented.

“ If you mean me, Billy Williams,” she protested hotly, “ it isn’t so ! I’ve never drawn you on—I’ve never given you any hope ! ”

“ *Isn’t* there any hope, Mollie ? ” I asked huskily.

She did not answer, and a sudden panic seized me.

“ Don’t answer right away,” I hurried on. “ I hadn’t expected to ask that till we were ready to go home. I sort of felt that—that out here in the desert, we might get to know each other better—not that I need to know you any better—but you don’t know me very well . . . ”

“ What makes you think so ? ” Mollie asked with a queer little laugh.

"You've only seen me now and then—you've been away so much . . ."

"I've seen you as often as you've seen me, haven't I?"

"Yes," I admitted; "but it isn't only seeing—it's thinking; and I've done so much thinking . . ."

Mollie, who had been leaning back against a sand-hummock with a certain languour, sat erect with a sudden start.

"What's that?" she whispered, staring out across the sand.

"What's what?" I asked, staring too, but seeing nothing but the empty waste.

"There—over toward the ruins—there's something moving."

I followed the direction of her pointing finger.

"I don't see anything," I said, after a moment.

"What was it like?"

"Just a—a sort of grey shape."

She was breathing quickly, and I could see that she was really frightened.

"If it was anything at all," I said, "it was just one of the natives. Don't be foolish, Mollie!"

"I'm not foolish!" she gasped. "I—I saw it last night! That's what I brought you out here to tell you!"

It wasn't till afterwards I reflected that I hadn't been conscious of her having brought me out—I had thought it sort of spontaneous—for her words sent a distinct shock through me.

"*What* did you see last night?" I demanded.

She paused a moment to get her breath, and I felt her groping hand seeking mine, and seized it and held it fast.

"I don't know what time it was," she began;

"but I had been sleeping a good while, and suddenly I woke, with cold sweat standing out all over me and simply shaking with fear."

"You had been dreaming," I said. "Nightmare—this Egyptian coffee is enough . . ."

"No, I hadn't been dreaming—at least, nothing horrible. But suddenly I woke up, with a sense of something ghastly standing right there by my cot."

"Well, was there?" I asked.

"I didn't dare look for a moment, I was so scared. When I did look, it was gone."

"There was never anything there," I said; "just your imagination."

"Yes, there was something—I saw it go out."

"What did you see?" I demanded, exasperated.

"I saw the tent-flap fall behind it—and I *thought* I saw a flash of something grey."

"Nonsense!" I protested. "See here, Mollie, don't you get to seeing things, too!"

I could have bit my tongue the instant the words were out, but it was too late.

"Do you mean that somebody else has been seeing things?" she demanded intensely.

"I mean that one of the natives was wandering about the camp the other night," I said, "and Jimmy saw him and thought it was a ghost. *You* didn't really see anything—only your tent-flap swinging in the breeze; in fact, I don't know how you could see that in the dark . . ."

"It wasn't dark—we have a night-lamp in the tent. And that wasn't all."

"All right," I said, wearily; "let's have the rest of it."

"I was so scared," said Mollie, "that I felt I *must* talk to somebody, so I got up and . . . you

know our tent is divided by canvas partitions—and I peeped in first at Ma Creel, and she was sleeping so sound I didn't have the heart to disturb her; so—I raised the other flap and looked into—*her* room—and—she wasn't there!”

“Wasn't there?” I echoed.

“No—her cot was empty.”

I confess a little chill ran over me at the words, though I can't imagine why. Then I shook myself together.

“Well, what of it?” I demanded. “If she couldn't sleep—if she wanted a breath of air—why, don't you see—that was it! She got up and peeped in to see if *you* were asleep, and you woke up just as she let the flap fall . . .”

“Why should she have done that?” asked Mollie. “I don't like it!”

And then I had a perfectly gorgeous flash of inspiration.

“I'll bet she had a date with Jimmy,” I said. “Those two are fixing things up when nobody's around! And they never so much as look at each other when anybody is!”

Mollie rose with a little unconvinced shake of the head.

“I don't believe they're fixing things up,” she said. “I don't believe the Roland cares a cent for him. I've thought of all that—but it's *too* simple. Besides, the awful feeling I had . . .”

“Listen, Mollie,” I said; “the feeling that I'm interested in is in regard to myself. How about it?”

Again she shook her head, but she was smiling now.

“I don't know . . .”

"Mollie . . ."

But she held me back.

"No," she said; "*I'll* have to do some thinking first! Look—there's the moon!"

"Confound the moon!" I protested. "It rises every night . . ."

"Hush!" she said, and laid her hand on mine, and I saw that she was searching the waste of sand before us for some sign of the grey shape she had fancied moving there. But it stretched away to the horizon blank and empty—and vaguely menacing.

"You see," I began.

But again she stopped me.

"It's there!" she breathed. "I know it's there. It's watching us! I can feel it! Come—let's get away!"

And she hurried back toward the tents.

CHAPTER XVI

A CAMERA-MAN'S first glance of a morning is always at the sky, his first thought always of the weather. Perhaps if I lived in Egypt long enough, I might break myself of this habit, for one day follows another—or did while I was there—as brightly and blandly as though there were no such things as rain or storm. Sometimes, toward evening, a biting wind springs up across the desert, but even this is not apparent under the palms.

Creel routed us out of our beds at dawn on the morning following my talk with Mollie, for he was anxious to take quite a string of pictures that day, and Davis had convinced him of the wisdom of sitting quietly in the shade during the hours that the sun was high. If he had had only himself to consider, I am sure he would never have thought of such a siesta ; but the natives wouldn't work during the heat of the day, and it was evident that Jimmy couldn't ; so thenceforward, perforce, he had to permit those hours to be wasted.

I had seen nothing of Jimmy the night before. He had been nowhere in sight when Mollie and I reached the tents, nor had he appeared before I turned in, and I took it for granted that he was mooning around somewhere with Mlle. Roland. In

fact, the more I thought of it, the more convinced I became that there was an understanding between them. I don't know at what time he came in, but he was sleeping away soundly enough when Creel called us, and had grumbled lustily at being shaken awake at so ungodly an hour !

I had been too busy dressing to look at him then ; but when we gathered around the table for the coffee and rolls which constituted our early breakfast, I saw that he was very nervous. The hand which raised his cup to his lips shook visibly. Creel noticed it too.

"How do you feel ? " he asked, lowering his voice so as not to disturb the women, who were to be permitted to sleep as long as they liked.

"Oh, all right," answered Jimmy carelessly.

"It takes a few days to get accustomed to the desert air," remarked Davis, who had turned out with the rest of us, perhaps in the hope of getting some excavating done at odd moments. "It is very dry and exhilarating. You'd probably all be better off for a sedative."

"Tobacco is the only sedative I need," said Jimmy, and lit a cigarette ; and just then we saw the natives, under Mustafa's guidance, filing out of their camp toward the ruins.

"Come on," said Creel, jumping up. "The sun will be up in a minute, and I want to catch the long shadows."

We got to the excavation just as the sun rose, and we had to wait till the natives had finished their orisons. Luckily Mohammedan prayers, though frequent, are brief, and we were soon at work.

First we took a series of scenes showing the natives, under Jimmy's direction, shovelling the sand and

debris from in front of the wall into their baskets, and carrying them up the stairs and dumping them. That double row of swiftly-moving figures up and down the steps was especially effective.

Then Jimmy and Creel, with Mustafa in the background, held a consultation in front of the wall, and tapped along it knowingly, and finally decided where it should be opened. Of course it was at the wrong place the first time; but the second time, Creel indicated the spot where the mummy had been buried, and the natives set to work tearing out the stones.

"Have you got something planted back there?" Jimmy asked, during a brief pause in our operations.

"Yes—we planted it last night. It's the mummy of your erstwhile favourite, whom you buried alive about four thousand years ago; and when it's dug up, you'll sort of recognize it; and you'll stare at it fascinated, wondering what there can possibly be about it that seems familiar; and as you look, it will seem to fill out and change to a living woman, just for an instant; and you'll be horror-stricken—go as far as you like—faint if you want to."

"It isn't a real mummy?" asked Jimmy, rather pale.

"Of course not," said Creel, "it's a papier-mâché fake I fixed up in New York."

"How does it come you never mentioned this burying-alive business?" Jimmy demanded. "I thought we talked the whole thing over."

"I never thought of it till last night," Creel explained. "It was the professor there who gave me the tip. Great business, too. I'd have read the script to you last night, but when I got it worked out and went to look for you, I couldn't find you."

"I was sitting out at the edge of the oasis looking at the desert," Jimmy explained quickly.

"Which reminds me," added Creel, "that I couldn't find the Princess, either—and we'll need her for the fade-away. I'd clean forgotten it. Digby, run over and ask her to get here as soon as she can—in her harem rig. Tell her I apologize for not giving her longer notice."

Digby nodded and hurried away.

"Now, Billy," said Creel to me, "you understand that after we've done the scene, you'll have to reel back to the place where Jimmy stares down at the mummy, and do a vision with the Princess in the mummy's place—not more than five or six feet—and don't be afraid to stop down. Now keep your wits about you!"

I nodded, and Creel gave the signal for the natives to go ahead with their work. He watched them until about half the stones were out.

"Now, Billy!" he said. "Come on, Jimmy," and the two pressed close to the opening as I began to turn the crank.

"By George, there's something there!" shouted Creel, who believed in dialogue appropriate to the scene, and he peered into the hole. "Look!"

"You're right!" said Jimmy, taking a look. "Hurry up, you!" and he urged the natives to renewed efforts. "Now!" and he and Creel pressed the bewildered natives back. "Help me get it out!"

"Careful!" said Creel, as he reached in and got hold of it. "That's it!" and they drew it slowly out into the light. "Lay it down here on the ground."

In spite of their knowledge that it was a fake and

that they themselves had helped to plant it the night before, the natives shrank back in a way which added a great touch of realism to the picture. Jimmy was standing staring down at the mummy, and I watched closely for the instant of the fade-out, my finger on the lever of the shutter-dissolve.

I had sometimes thought Jimmy more of a *matinée* idol than an actor, but that may have been merely because of the rotten scripts which were sometimes passed out to him; at any rate, I changed my opinion as I watched him through that scene. For a moment he stared down at the gruesome figure with a look half-puzzled, half-fascinated; then he shook his head, and glanced apologetically at Creel. But Creel also was looking at the mummy, though only with a sort of polite interest; and again Jimmy turned his eyes upon it, and brushed his hand feverishly across his forehead; then he seemed to stiffen, as at some horrible vision . . .

"Now!" said Creel, who had been watching him out of the corner of his eye, and I stopped down slowly, and then opened up again, carefully counting the turns of the crank.

The scene didn't last long, after that, for Jimmy's legs seemed to sort of fold up under him, and he sank down beside the mummy in one of the prettiest faints I ever saw. Creel, with an exclamation of alarm, sprang to him and raised his head . . .

"All right; shut off!" said Creel.

"Seven-seventeen," I said, and closed my shutter and began to reel back for the double-exposure.

"All right, Jimmy," I heard Creel say; and then, in a sharper tone, "Jimmy!"

I knew something was wrong, but I didn't dare look until I got those seventeen turns repeated.

"He's really fainted!" said Davis, who had hurried forward—he had been watching the scene from the first with an interest which surprised me. "Carry him over here in the shade. The water-bottle, Mustafa!"

"See that nobody touches that mummy, Billy!" said Creel sharply; and then, while I stood guard over the mummy, Creel and Davis carried Jimmy over in one corner and propped him against the wall, and dashed water into his face.

And then Mustafa made a queer noise in his throat, and I saw him staring at something over my shoulder, and I turned to see Mlle. Roland coming slowly down the steps.

And I stared, too, for if ever a woman looked like an houri straight out of Paradise, it was she at that moment! The costume—I mentally took off my hat to the designer and to Ma Creel, for it was absolutely perfect. A real Princess would have been glad to possess it!

And then I heard a quick gasp run through the group of natives, and looked to see if they had fallen to their knees again . . .

They had not. They were leaning forward, staring with shining eyes and quivering lips and nervously-working fingers. And suddenly I remembered what that diaphanous costume meant to them; I understood their libidinous, sweaty faces . . .

The veil of the harem had been rent—its rarest occupant profaned by the eyes of men . . .

Davis had also seen and understood.

"Tell those fellows to get out!" he shouted to Mustafa; and Mustafa's words must have stung like whips, for the natives shrank hastily back into the farthest corner.

And then the girl caught sight of Jimmy's prostrate figure.

"What has happened?" she demanded, sharply, quickening her pace.

"He has fainted," Creel explained. "He can't stand the heat, it seems. He'll be all right in a minute."

And indeed at that moment Jimmy moved his head feebly and uttered a faint groan.

"I'll take care of him," said Davis. "He's all right now. You go ahead with your work."

"Thanks!" said Creel, and sprang to his feet. I could guess the anguish he had been in for fear the scene would be spoiled. "Now, Princess, I want you to take the mummy's place . . . It hasn't been moved, has it, Billy?" he asked sharply.

"It hasn't been touched," I assured him.

He was staring down at it, a perplexed wrinkle between his eyes.

"I didn't know we had crossed its hands like that," he said, and I saw that the mummy's hands were decorously folded across its breast. "But no matter. Princess . . ."

She too was staring down at the mummy with an expression which struck me as faintly ironical.

"Where did you discover it?" she asked.

"We just dug it out from behind that wall," said Creel.

"From behind that wall?" and she stared at the opening with an astonishment I did not understand. "Surely . . ."

"It's just a fake," explained Creel impatiently, "and we planted it there last night. For heaven's sake, don't tell me that you're afraid of it, too!"

"Oh, no," she said composedly. "It strikes me as rather ridiculous. What is it I am to do?"

"It's your mummy, you know," said Creel, "buried alive there four thousand years ago, and Jimmy has just discovered it. I'm sorry I didn't have time to go over all this with you, but I worked it out just last night."

"I think I understand," she said, with a little smile. "I am to be resurrected."

"Something like that. Look at the mummy's attitude carefully. Now I want you to lie down exactly where the mummy is, and smile up as though there was a man standing where I am standing now. Jimmy stood there, you know, and fainted when he saw you."

"Fainted in earnest, it seems," said Mlle. Roland, with a fleeting glance in Jimmy's direction.

"Yes—but it will register great. Wait a minute," and he marked the place where the mummy was lying, and then I helped him lift it out of the way, and Mlle. Roland composedly took its place. "Your head just here," and he adjusted it by the marks in the sand. "Your feet here; your hands crossed on your breast. That's right. Are you ready, Billy? I only want four or five feet, remember, and stop it well down."

"All right," I said.

Creel stepped back out of the picture, and took a last look at the prostrate girl.

"Shoot!" he said, and the Princess smiled slowly up at her imaginary lover.

"One — two — three — four — five — six — seven," I counted, opening the shutter from a pin-point to number eight, and then stopping it down again till it was closed. "I think that will be all right," and I started on to complete the seventeen, when there was a loud cry from Davis.

"Look out, man; look out!" he shouted, and I turned just in time to see Jimmy as he fell forward.

I have always been proud of the fact that I went on counting till I had my film properly re-wound. It was just habit, I suppose; but then it is habit which sends the soldier over the top for the charge when the word is given, and he is called a hero, and gets medals and pensions and things! I got a medal too, in a way—the only sort of medal a cameraman can ever hope to get—when Creel said to me quietly, half an hour later, "I'm glad *you* didn't lose your head, Billy!"

What had happened, as nearly as I could find out, was that Jimmy had come gradually to his senses, and opened his eyes just at the moment that Mlle. Roland took her place on the sand. He didn't see her at first—just looked vacantly around trying to remember what had happened and where he was; then he took a swallow of the water Davis held to his lips; then, as Creel stepped back, he saw the girl, and clawed himself to his feet before Davis could intervene.

"Good God!" he breathed. "It's true, then!"

And before Davis could catch him, he had pitched forward into the sand.

CHAPTER XVII

IT must have been half an hour before Jimmy opened his eyes, and when he tried to walk, he found himself so weak that we had to send two men along with him to help him over to the tents.

"You lie down for a while," said Creel, "and tell my wife to give you a lemonade with a dash of brandy in it."

Jimmy smiled feebly.

"I'll be all right in half an hour," he protested. "It's just this infernal heat," and he wavered away up the steps, with a native supporting him on either side.

Mlle. Roland, who had seated herself on the empty mummy-case, watched him with every appearance of anxiety as he tottered away out of sight.

"He seems very ill," she said, sympathetically; but nevertheless I thought it strange that she hadn't offered to hold his head, or something; and stranger still that, when he opened his eyes the second time, Jimmy hadn't once glanced in her direction. If there really was an understanding between them, they were certainly taking extraordinary pains to conceal it!

"He is ill," said Creel, savagely, "and what's more, I'm afraid he's going to be worse. Do you really think it is just the heat, Professor?"

Davis was combing his beard thoughtfully.

"What else could it be?" he asked.

"I don't know. But does heat affect a man that way?"

"Oh, quite frequently. It makes people light-headed—gives 'em hallucinations, and all that."

"Jimmy certainly has the hallucinations, all right!" commented Creel.

"There's one comfort, anyway," I said; "they don't interfere with his acting. Jimmy never did better work than he did this morning. Why, when he looked down at that mummy, he made my flesh creep. You'd have sworn he was seeing just what he pretended to see."

"Perhaps he was," said Davis, in a low voice. "In fact, I think that is just what made him keel over—a hallucination that the mummy was really coming to life."

Creel slapped his leg.

"That's it!" he said. "Then, when he opened his eyes, the first thing he saw, almost before he got his senses back, was the Princess there on the ground where the mummy had been, and he thought it was true, and it set him off again!"

"Yes," agreed Davis. "I think that's it."

"Is there anything we can do for him?"

"Nothing but keep him quiet out of the sun, and give him cooling drinks."

"I thought so," said Creel. "I only hope he won't get worse. For his own sake, of course, as well as for mine. But it certainly would be an awful blow if he couldn't go ahead with the picture. Well, Princess," he added, turning to her with a smile, "thank heaven *you're* ready to go ahead!"

"Oh, yes," she said, and rose eagerly.

Creel stood a moment looking down at her.

"I don't know how you do it," he said, "but you certainly get the real Oriental atmosphere. You would deceive the Muslims themselves!"

"Do you think so?" she laughed. "Then I should have no difficulty in deceiving Americans!"

"You'll lift them off their seats," said Creel. "I tell you seriously, Princess, that your fortune is made."

"I shall never forget who made it for me!" she said, and dropped him a little curtsy.

Creel laughed grimly.

"If I had any sense," he said, "I'd sign you up right now for a five-year contract."

"I am ready!"

"No—it wouldn't be fair to you. But I want you to give me the first chance."

"The first chance, and the second, and as many as you like," she said, earnestly. "I promise you that!"

"Shake hands on it!" said Creel, and I could see that he was moved. "Now," he added, in another tone, "there are two or three fade-aways we can make without Jimmy, and some scenes inside your tent."

"Will you need any of the natives?" asked Davis.

"Only three or four fat ones to act as eunuchs," said Creel.

"There aren't any fat ones," said Davis, "but I'll pick out the least skinny. I'll put the others to work, then—there's no use letting them stand around idle—and I've just got to a place which promises to be interesting."

"All right," said Creel, with a smile. "Work 'em as hard as you like."

And then we did two or three fade-aways of the Princess and the mummy, one of them inside the mummy-case set against the wall; and by that time it had grown so hot that we knocked off work till afternoon. Davis, who had discovered a fresh strip of wall, declared he would keep the natives going for another hour if he had to take a whip to them; and we left them toiling up and down the steps with their baskets of sand, and the sweat running from them in streams.

We found Jimmy sitting in front of the shelter-tent, talking to Ma Creel and Mollie.

"How do you feel?" asked Creel, stopping in front of him and eyeing him severely.

"I feel all right," Jimmy answered, and, except for a slight pallor, he seemed quite himself again. "I don't know what came over me—I just seemed to go sort of light-headed."

"Davis says that's the way heat affects some people," said Creel. "You'll have to keep out of the sun as much as you can."

"Yes, I suppose that was it," Jimmy assented, but it seemed to me that there was a certain lack of conviction in his voice. "Anyway, I'm ready to go to work again."

"There's no more work till afternoon," said Creel shortly. "You sit still. Digby, I'm ready to set up that fancy tent."

"All right," said Digby, and hastened away toward the store-house; and presently, with the help of the natives whom Davis had told off to assist, they erected a gorgeous strip of decorated canvas representing the entrance to a tent—the kind one sees in pictures in the Arabian Nights. The other side, of course, represented the inside of the tent,

and here rugs and cushions and tabourettes and such things were arranged to simulate a luxurious Oriental interior.

While Digby and Creel were labouring away at this, Davis came up and stopped to watch them.

"Hello!" he said. "What's all this?"

"This," said Creel, "is the tent the king provides for his favourite when he takes her with him on a journey."

"I thought the favourites were always left at home," smiled Davis, "and amused themselves with another lover in the king's absence. That's usually the way in the story-books."

"This one was the victim of an infamous plot," said Creel. "You see, she had been brought from away up the river, and worshipped other gods; so the priests didn't like her, and neither did the former favourite, and neither did the prime minister, who was the former favourite's lover. So they framed up an accusation that she had desecrated an altar; and the king, who had begun to weary of her anyway, decided to treat himself to a new sensation by burying her alive, and brought her out here to do it. Afterwards comes remorse, when he finds that it was a frame-up—but I think I told you about that. Just now we are getting ready for the scene in which he tells her of her approaching fate."

"Rubbish!" scoffed Davis, and hurried on to clean up for lunch.

"I know it sounds like rubbish," said Creel, looking around at his properties and addressing Digby and me; "and furthermore it looks like rubbish; but wait till I get it put together in a picture!"

At lunch, Jimmy seemed to be quite all right again, and protested that he had never felt more fit. So,

as most of our work would be done in the shade, anyway, Creel told him to go ahead and get into his Oriental costume. Ma Creel and Mollie and Digby also got into theirs, Mustafa was summoned and invested with his robes of office, and six bronze Egyptians were draped in some voluminous white garments supposed to resemble those which eunuchs of the harem habitually wore.

We did some stunning scenes before the tent and inside it. Jimmy's acting wasn't up to that of the morning, but it was very good, and Mlle. Roland was fairly vibrant. Very little rehearsing was necessary, for they both had caught the spirit of the story, and Creel became more and more radiant as the scenes proceeded.

"We've got it!" he said to me once, in a low tone that fairly sizzled with excitement. "Great Scott, Billy, just look at that woman!"

And I looked, as I ground steadily away, and was thrilled through and through. Why so gifted a woman had been permitted to play minor parts I could not understand. Perhaps she had never before found one that exactly fitted her; or perhaps there was a cabal against her, such as I had heard sometimes existed among French actors. But the cabal, if it ever existed, would be helpless now! For her name was made. Jimmy did his best to play up to her, but it was easy to see that she would carry off the honours of the picture.

It was hard work, and we were all pretty tired when Creel finally thrust his script into his pocket and announced that we were done for the day.

"We'll do the burying-alive scene in the morning," he said. "I've got to get the ground ready for it, and it will take some time. Now, Jimmy, I

want you to take a good rest, for the scene will have to be played over there in the excavation, and it will be a strenuous one. I don't want you to keel over right in the midst of it."

"No fear," Jimmy assured him.

"And you, Princess," added Creel. "You've worked hard this afternoon—and done wonderfully! I congratulate you!"

"Thank you," said Mlle. Roland. "But I am very strong—I feel that I could go on for ever."

"No, you couldn't," said Creel sharply, and looked more closely at her flushed face and shining eyes. "I shouldn't be surprised if you had a touch of fever this minute!"

"No, no!" she protested. "I have, perhaps, a little—a very little agitation; but that is natural."

"Well, no more for to-day," said Creel. "You go and lie down and rest till dinner-time."

She dropped him a mock-curtsy, and hurried away to her tent.

"Put your box away, Billy," said Creel to me. "and we'll go over to the excavation, and get things ready for morning. Mustafa, take the robes of those fellows and give them some tobacco or something."

"Vurry good, saar," said Mustafa; "but they deserve nothing—they have done no work."

"They'll jump quicker when I want them to do some," Creel pointed out; and Mustafa bowed before his superior wisdom.

As we walked over toward the excavation, we were surprised to see no sign of the labourers toiling up with their endless baskets of sand.

"It can't be that he's knocked off work," said

Creel. "He'd never do that—unless something's happened." And then we came to the top of the stair. "By George!" he cried; "I believe the old scout has really found something!" for the whole bunch of natives were grouped together at the farther end of the excavation, staring at something that looked like another fragment of wall. Right in front of the wall, we caught a glimpse of Davis's white helmet.

I don't know why it was, but we both bounded down those steps and across the excavation, and pushed through the crowd of natives, as though we had some vital interest in Davis's discovery, whatever it might be. We saw that it was indeed a fragment of wall which he had uncovered—a wall built of small, square blocks of white stone laid in some dark mortar—and Davis was carefully brushing the sand from some sort of inscription.

"What is it, Professor?" asked Creel. "Found something? Whew!" he whistled, as Davis started round at sound of his voice. "Yes, I guess you have!"

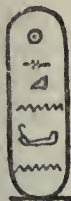
For the little man was trembling with excitement; his face was as white as his beard; his eyes were shining with a strange, unearthly light.

"The missing link!" he answered hoarsely. "The missing link! By God, I've found it!"

"The missing link!" Creel echoed, staring at the wall; "I always thought that was a monkey or something . . ."

"No, no! The missing link in the history of Egypt—the clue to the great riddle—a light on the darkness of five centuries! There it is in front of you!"

I followed his shaking finger, and saw, cut in one of the stones of the wall, a sort of oval, with some strange marks inside of it, and standing on a flat base. At the top was a circle with a dot in the middle, then a dash, then a triangle, then a section of saw-teeth, then a thing that might have been intended for an arm holding a whip, and finally some more saw-teeth, like this :



“Do you mean this thing?” asked Creel, and put his finger on the oval.

“Don’t touch it! Don’t touch it!” screamed Davis, snatching his hand away. “Yes, I mean that! But you couldn’t guess what it is—not by any possibility could you guess what it is!”

“No,” said Creel, looking at it with his head on one side, “I couldn’t—unless some boy found a nail or something, and amused himself by scratching . . .”

“Boy!” cried Davis. “Amused himself! Why, man, that is the cartouche of Sekenyen-Rē!”

CHAPTER XVIII

LET me say here that it wasn't till afterwards that I learned how to spell Sekenyen-Rē. Up to that moment, I had never heard of him. Neither had Creel. And I had always thought that cartouche meant cartridge—I know I had seen the word cartouche-box somewhere, I have forgotten where, but it is associated in my mind with Zouave uniforms. So we both stared rather blankly into Davis's shining face. Then Creel put his head a little more to one side.

"Come again, Professor," he said, "and speak English."

"The names of the kings of Egypt," Davis explained, with a patience which surprised me, "were always enclosed in an oval or cartouche, and no other names were distinguished in that way. So we know that this is a king's name. The circle represents the Sun-god, Rē. This next, which looks like a dash, is the letter s; the triangle represents the k sound; this dog-tooth represents the letter n. There it is—Sekenyen-Rē. This other symbol, the arm and sceptre, means that he ruled over Upper and Lower Egypt."

"It sounds a good deal like shorthand," commented Creel.

"It is shorthand," agreed Davis. "In Egyptian writing, only the consonants were inscribed—the vowels were omitted as inessential, just as they are in most modern systems of shorthand."

"All right," said Creel. "The Egyptians invented shorthand—I've learned that much. And who was this old boy?"

"Sekenyen-Rē was one of the Hyksos, or shepherd-kings—foreigners—Bedouins, probably—who ruled over Egypt for five hundred years, and concerning whom we know next to nothing. Those five centuries are centuries of absolute darkness!"

"Oh, I begin to see!" said Creel, and his bantering air dropped from him. "You expect to find a clue here?"

"I believe," answered Davis, tremulously, "that this is the door of a tomb; it has every appearance of being undisturbed; therefore the king's mummy should be inside. If it is . . ." He stopped and turned toward Creel hotly. "I suppose," he said, "that you've come to tell me that you want these men for that infernal picture of yours!"

"No, old man," said Creel with the true feeling of one artist for another, "I don't want them. Take them—I won't bother you again till you've finished. And if you put it over—well, I take off my hat to you, that's all!"

Davis caught Creel's hand in both of his and I could have sworn there were tears in his eyes.

"Thank you, Creel; thank you," he said hoarsely. "I shouldn't have spoken like that—forgive me. After all, they're your men, not mine."

"They're yours as long as you need them."

"It's more than I have any right to expect," said

Davis, humbly. "But you won't regret it. And you're right—this is a big thing."

"I can see that," said Creel, and looked at the wall meditatively. "You really think there's a tomb back of that wall?"

"I'm sure of it. Look, here is the outline of the door before it was walled up—here is the arch . . ."

"Of course!" and Creel slapped his leg. "We'll wall up the Princess there! The very thing! And it's out of there we'll have to dig her mummy. Professor, if you'll give me ten minutes before you begin, I'll not delay you another instant."

"All right," agreed Davis; "that's little enough to ask! I want to take some photographs of the door, anyway, before I begin to tear it down."

"You don't need to—Billy will take all the pictures you want. Billy, go and get your box, and tell Jimmy to jump into his khaki and get over here as soon as he can. And bring my suit—I can put it on here."

I saw what was in his mind, and rushed over to the tents.

"Where's Jimmy?" I shouted to Digby and Ma Creel, who were sitting out in front.

"He's lying down, I think," said Ma Creel. "He's probably asleep. You mustn't disturb him."

"He's got to be disturbed," I said. "We can't wait."

"But look here, Billy," Ma Creel protested, "he's sick—I'll go over and tell Warrie . . ."

"No, I'm not sick," said Jimmy's voice, and I turned to see him coming out from under the tent-flap. "What is it, Billy?"

"Davis has found a tomb he's going to open," I said. "Creel wants you to jump into your khaki and get over there right away. Take his outfit with you."

"All right," said Jimmy, and let the flap fall again; while I dived into the property-tent, and got out my box and loaded it.

When I hustled out again, Mustafa was there, having been sent by Davis to get two electric torches. He also was very excited.

"It iss a tomb—it iss a tomb," he said; "of that be certain! Make haste! Meestaire Davies, he can not wait!"

Mollie had joined the other two in front of the tent, attracted by the excited talking, and by the time Digby had found the torches, Jimmy came out arrayed in his khaki, and with Creel's suit and helmet under his arm.

"Let's all go over," said Ma Creel. "I've never seen a tomb opened."

"Where's Mlle. Roland?" I asked. "Maybe she'd like to go too."

"She's asleep," said Mollie, rather sharply. "Take my advice and leave her alone."

I didn't see very well how I could do anything else, and as Ma Creel seemed to agree with Mollie, I said nothing more, and set off with them toward the excavation. But I couldn't help thinking we were playing the girl a rather shabby trick. Tombs weren't opened every day; and if we really found something . . .

But I soon forgot all about her in the excitement of taking the picture. First I took some close-ups for Davis, to show the cartouche and the arching, while Creel retired behind a mound of debris and hustled into his khaki. Then the natives went to work with picks and crowbars, with Jimmy and Creel seemingly directing them, but with Davis in the background giving the real orders. It was no easy

job to keep him in the background ! Creel had drawn two lines in the sand to show him how far he could come, and had told Digby to watch him ; but he had his hands full keeping him out of the picture. In fact, when the first stone came out, the old Egyptologist was uncontrollable. He threw off Digby's hand and rushed forward and fell to his knees and peered into the hole.

"Hold on, Billy," said Creel. "Let him look ! After all, it's his show !" And he went forward himself to see what there was to see.

Davis had an electric torch in one hand, and was staring in at what its beam revealed to him.

"It's all right," he said, looking up with a sort of awed face, as Creel approached. "It's intact, just as I thought it would be. It hasn't caved a particle. You can go ahead now."

"Let me take a look," said Creel, and he took the torch and knelt in front of the hole, and threw the ray of light into the darkness beyond. "It's quite a place, isn't it ?" he said ; and a minute later he added, "It seems to be empty."

"Oh, yes," said Davis ; "the sarcophagus will be in an inner chamber."

Creel took another survey of the tomb.

"How do you know there is an inner chamber ?" he asked. "I see no sign of a door."

"There's certain to be one," Davis assured him. "All these tombs were built on the same general plan. The door may have been walled up."

Creel got up and brushed the sand off his knees.

"All right, Jimmy," he said ; then he took a quick step forward. "What's the matter ?" he asked.

I had been so busy looking at the hole that I hadn't noticed Jimmy. Now I saw that he had

sunk down in the shade against the wall, and that he was as white as death.

"I—I feel a little faint," he gasped. "I'll be all right in a minute," and he started to rise.

But Creel pressed him down again.

"Sit still," he commanded. "We've got nearly enough of this stuff, anyway. Wait till they get the hole big enough to enter. Tell your men to go ahead, Professor."

So the natives went ahead prying out the stones, which were laid in a black mortar which Davis said was bitumen; and Jimmy leaned back against the wall, while Ma Creel fanned him and babied him; and gradually he began to look more like himself.

"I'm all right," he said to Creel, finally, "when-ever you're ready for me."

"We'll do a bit here, then," said Creel, "with both of us looking through the hole. All right, Billy!"

We did a short scene, and Jimmy seemed to get through it fairly well. I didn't know till afterwards that he had shut his eyes every time he faced the hole, but Creel saw it and it worried him. When the scene was over, he made Jimmy sit down again, and the labourers went ahead taking out more stones.

"It's big enough now," said Davis, at last, and waved the natives back. "I'm going in."

"Wait a minute," said Creel. "Let Jimmy go in, and come out again, and then I won't bother you any more. Come along, Jimmy. All right, Billy!"

I saw Jimmy pull himself to his feet and stagger rather than walk toward the hole.

"Great!" said Creel, who was close behind him.

"Just the effect I want! Some instinct tells you

that some awful tragedy happened here thousands of years ago—and that you were somehow concerned in it. Oh, great, great!” for Jimmy had dropped to his knees before the hole, as though his legs could no longer support him, and was convulsively gripping its edges. “Let’s have a little more of your face!” and Jimmy obediently turned towards us a profile like that of a dead man. “Now go in—like a man going to his death!”

And it was indeed like a man going to his death that Jimmy clawed his way through that hole.

“All right, Billy!” said Creel, as soon as Jimmy was through, and I stopped grinding and closed my shutter. “We’ll bring out the mummy to-morrow. Now, Professor, I turn things over to you. Come on out, Jimmy!” he called, raising his voice, for Jimmy had not yet appeared.

I don’t know what it was; but at that instant the sickening certainty rushed over me that Jimmy would not appear—that something had happened—something terrible . . .

Creel must have had the same sensation, for he grabbed the torch from Davis’s hand and rushed forward to the hole.

“Come on out, Jimmy!” he shouted again.

There was no reply, and Creel flung himself on his knees before the hole and peered inside. For a long moment I could see him playing the beam from the torch about the interior. Then he looked around at us with a face distorted by fear.

“He’s not there!” he cried, his voice hoarse with horror. “The tomb is empty!”

CHAPTER XIX

IT was Davis who recovered his senses first, who pushed Creel aside and flung himself through the hole into the darkness within. Creel was after him in an instant.

"Look out for my box, Digby," I cried, and plunged after Creel. I felt somehow that he was in danger—that he needed help—that he mustn't be left alone.

I landed heavily, for the floor of the tomb seemed to be considerably below the level of the ground outside. It was of stone, as were the bare walls over which Davis and Creel were sweeping the light from their torches—the same white limestone which had been used for the exterior walls, and laid in the same black bitumen. The chamber itself was some twelve or fifteen feet across, and roofed with great slabs of stone. One glance was enough to show that it was empty. The white walls, flashing back the light, would have made the smallest object visible.

"I told you so!" said Creel, hoarsely. "He isn't here! He's disappeared! It's witchcraft—it's . . ."

"Wait!" said Davis, and swept his torch over the walls more slowly. Then he stepped quickly to

the wall opposite the entrance, and to my astonishment seemed to walk right through it and disappear.

Before either of us could move, his head appeared again.

"Come on!" he said, and vanished.

I could feel the shivers running up and down my spine as I followed Creel forward to the wall—he was right—it was witchcraft—horrible, unclean witchcraft . . .

And then I saw that it wasn't witchcraft at all; for a section of the wall had been built some eighteen inches in front of the main wall, and behind this section gaped the black, square opening of a stone-walled corridor. Seen from in front, the effect was that of a continuous wall; Davis, perhaps, was familiar with the artifice, and knew what to look for; but how Jimmy had discovered it, in the dark . . .

Ahead of us, down the corridor, we could see Davis's light sweeping from side to side, and we hurried after him. The passage was above five feet wide by perhaps six high—I know my helmet scraped the roof—with a floor that sloped perceptibly downwards, covered, here and there, with drifted sand. The walls were built of square blocks of the white limestone, laid in bitumen, and were entirely bare of ornament. Davis told me afterwards that it was forty-two feet long, but it seemed a mile that first time I traversed it.

However, I dare say it was only a minute later that we stood beside Davis at the entrance to another chamber, much larger than the first, its slabbed roof supported by four massive square columns of masonry. And between these columns, in the centre

of the chamber, stood what I took to be a great oblong block of granite, flashing back the light of the torches from its polished sides.

"It's the sarcophagus!" said Davis hoarsely. "And it has never been opened. Look!" and he ran the light from his torch along a line of cement that held the lid in place. It had evidently never been disturbed.

"But where's Jimmy?" Creel demanded. "I must find that boy . . ."

He stopped abruptly, for there, at the head of the sarcophagus, brought into view as we stepped toward it, was Jimmy Allen. He was half-crouching, half-kneeling, with his head pillowed on the stone and his arms thrown forward across it. And his eyes were closed.

"Jimmy!" called Creel, and then he stopped, and I knew that the same fear had gripped his heart which gripped mine.

"It's only a faint," said Davis reassuringly, and stepped forward.

And at that instant Jimmy's eyes unclosed, and he raised his head and looked at us. Somehow it had on me the effect of a resurrection. I swear I could not have been more shocked if a corpse had raised its head and looked at us!

"Hullo, fellows," he said, quite casually. Then he looked down at the block of granite against which he was leaning, and around at the masonry columns, and finally he got slowly to his feet; with us watching him all the time, scarcely daring to breathe. "Where the deuce are we?" he asked.

"We're in a tomb," explained Creel, as gently as though he were speaking to a child. "Come along—let's get out."

"But how did I get in?" Jimmy demanded, still looking about him. "I don't remember coming in."

"You climbed in through a hole out here, while Billy filmed you—you remember that, surely!"

"Oh, yes," said Jimmy, and then he shook his head in a puzzled way. "But afterwards—what happened afterwards?"

"You just walked on in here and we followed you," Creel explained, easily. "You were a little done up by the heat, you remember. Come along out of here—this place is like an oven!"

And for the first time I was conscious that it *was* like an oven—so close and stifling that the sweat had been running down my face, though I hadn't perceived it, in the excitement. Davis explained afterwards that all desert tombs were like that—the heat stored up in the sand never permitted them to cool off.

But Jimmy didn't seem to notice the heat. He still stood staring around, and then he inclined an ear toward the rear wall and seemed to listen; and then his face suddenly cleared, and he smiled slightly, as though he remembered everything.

"All right," he said, turning to Creel, "I'm ready to go," and without further question or comment, he followed Creel along the passage, across the outer room, and through the hole into the open air. I went along, and I supposed Davis to be bringing up the rear, till I looked back and saw he wasn't there.

Ma Creel welcomed Jimmy like a long lost son whom she had despaired of ever seeing again, and she and Mollie, with Creel's approval, took him away to the tents, despite his protests that he was

all right. In fact, he wouldn't go at all until Creel pointed out to him that it was too dark anyway to take any more pictures.

As Creel and I were gathering up our things, Davis appeared at the entrance to the tomb and dismissed the labourers.

"I'll want them here early in the morning," he said to Mustafa. Then he turned to Creel and me. "I've found something interesting in there," he said. "Would you care to see it?"

"Of course we would!" said Creel.

"Come along, then!"

We stooped and scrambled after him down into the tomb, and followed him along the passage into the inner chamber. He led us up to the great granite sarcophagus and let the light from his torch play along the lid.

"Look there," he said, and I saw, cut delicately in the stone, the same symbol which had been cut on the door of the tomb—the cartouche of Sken-yen-Rē. "It has never been opened," Davis continued, and again he ran his torch around the edge of the lid, where the cement remained untouched and as hard as the stone itself. "Unless I'm greatly mistaken we'll find the mummy-case and the mummy inside, just as they were left four thousand years ago—and I'm hoping we'll also find an explanation of—this mystery," and he indicated the walls about us with a vague and troubled gesture.

"What mystery?" Creel demanded.

"The mystery of these bare walls. You'll notice that there's not a picture—not a trace of sculpture—and it's evident that there never has been," and he sent the light from his torch shimmering over the white stone.

"Yes," Creel agreed, "that's evident enough."

"The only decorations I have found—and I've looked the place over pretty carefully—are this cartouche on the lid of the sarcophagus, and that symbol on the wall back yonder," and he threw the light against the wall at the back of the tomb.

By a common impulse, we walked over to the wall, and I saw incised there, about five feet from the floor, a rude symbol which faintly resembled a snake—or perhaps two snakes intertwined.

"What does it mean?" Creel asked.

"It's a symbol of warning," Davis explained.

"It looks like there was another door here," said Creel, who had been running his eyes over the wall. "See,—there's the arch—just like the one outside."

"Yes," Davis agreed, "I think it is a door; and that that symbol is intended to warn people away from it. It was only used," he added, looking at it, "where the warning was intended to be a very solemn and urgent one. No Egyptian would dare disregard it, for fear of giving mortal offence to the gods."

"Then there's probably something in there," Creel began . . .

"So I think," Davis broke in. "I'll have the door open in a day or two," he added; "and we'll see."

"Is that the mystery you were talking about?" Creel inquired.

"No," and Davis cast the light from his torch about the chamber again. "The mystery is the lack of decoration on these walls. I can't understand it."

"What's so strange about that?" Creel demanded.

“The great central belief of the ancient Egyptians was that, after death, a man’s Ka or double—that is, his spirit—continued to live on,” Davis explained, “so long as it had a body to shelter it and the things necessary to live with. So the body was carefully mummified and placed in a massive, indestructible tomb; and often a portrait statue of the dead man would be placed in the tomb also, for the spirit to take refuge in, should the actual body crumble away. The tomb was really the man’s eternal dwelling-place, to which his spirit must always return from every excursion about the universe, and his house on earth was merely a sort of wayside inn—so unimportant that great monarchs contented themselves with houses of mud brick, in order that they might lavish all their wealth upon their tombs and temples. You understand, this is the roughest sort of outline . . .”

“Yes,” said Creel. “Words of one syllable! Go on!”

“Every man took care, of course, that his tomb should be made as large and comfortable and impregnable as possible, and that it should be completely furnished with food and furniture and utensils and servants, and everything he could need in the way of clothing and ornaments—not really, you understand, but painted or chiselled on the walls; for the belief was that the spirit of the dead man possessed in reality everything depicted on the walls of his tomb; and the more that was painted there, the richer he was for eternity. So, in the tombs of the kings, which were naturally the largest and most elaborate of any, every sort of thing was painted for which the king, while alive, had any need—not only that, but his favourite occupations and amusements,

so that he could keep on doing for eternity what it had pleased him to do on earth. But here is the tomb of a king and in it—nothing ! ”

“ I think I understand,” said Creel, looking around thoughtfully. “ You mean that, according to the ancient belief, a man buried in a bare tomb like this would have no clothes, nor food, nor servants, nor occupation . . . ”

“ Precisely,” nodded Davis. “ In other words, to use a modern phrase, he’d be in hell—a place of ceaseless torment—and finally would come annihilation, which the Egyptians dreaded most of all.”

Creel ran his fingers through his hair.

“ Somebody must have had a grudge against Sekenyen,” he remarked.

“ My own idea is,” said Davis, “ that it was a self-inflicted punishment—a sort of penance—the most terrible a man could devise ! ”

“ What makes you think that ? ” demanded Creel, his eyes suddenly alight.

“ A king always had his tomb prepared in advance,” Davis explained, “ to make sure that it was satisfactory and properly commodious. In fact, that was about the most important thing he had to do on earth—to prepare his eternal dwelling—and he took a lot of pains with it. It took a hundred thousand men thirty years to build a tomb for Cheops—the great pyramid, you know. So this tomb was probably built according to the orders and under the supervision of Sekenyen-Rē.”

“ Great ! ” said Creel. “ Superb ! And now *why* should he condemn himself to eternal torment ? ”

“ I don’t know,” and Davis combed his beard thoughtfully ; “ but I hope to find a clue to the

mystery inside the sarcophagus—there will be hieroglyphs on the coffin, and perhaps a papyrus inside it . . .”

“Look there!” Creel broke in suddenly. “What is that?” and following his gesture and pointed light, I saw, half-concealed in a low niche in the farther corner, what looked like a wooden box some two feet square.

“That is the chest for the canopic jars,” Davis explained.

“The canopic jars?”

“Yes—for the viscera. They were always sealed up in jars and placed in the tomb with the body. Hello,” he added, for just then his light went out. “I thought that was a fresh battery,” and he pushed the button back and forth, “but it’s gone!” and he dropped the torch into his pocket.

“I might make a guess at *this* mystery,” said Creel, after a moment; “in fact, I have already guessed it, and I am going to work it into my picture. But there’s another mystery I can’t explain—I can’t even guess at . . .”

“What is that?” asked Davis.

“It’s how that boy, Jimmy Allen, coming through that hole, into the darkness of the tomb, could find the narrow opening behind that masking wall, which I couldn’t find, even with an electric torch,” said Creel, in a voice muted by bewilderment. “Furthermore, why should he come along that passage? Why should he have knelt at the head of this coffin? How, in the dark, could he know that it *was* the head? And how on earth, after he *had* knelt there, could he lay his head down and go quietly to sleep? There, Professor, is a series of questions to which I invite an answer.”

"I'm afraid I can't answer them," said Davis, quietly. "The whole affair is most singular."

"They've got to be answered!" said Creel savagely. "Maybe he'll remember . . ."

"No, I don't think he will," broke in Davis, combing his beard thoughtfully. "My own idea is that it was a sort of sleep-walking or clairvoyance. The heat had affected him—he was nervous about crawling through that hole, anybody could see that."

"Yes," assented Creel. "He just dragged himself through. Go on."

"Well, perhaps when he dropped into the darkness of the tomb, what with his nervousness and excitement, instead of fainting, as he had done before, he passed into a sort of sub-conscious state, and it was then that he stumbled upon the passage and came in here to the sarcophagus, and knelt down and went to sleep."

"I thought you said you couldn't explain it," said Creel.

"That isn't an explanation," retorted Davis; "not a reasonable one, at least. It is based on some occult power nobody knows anything about—and which, to tell you the truth, I don't believe in when I'm out of Egypt. But there's something in the air here which makes it possible to believe almost anything."

"Yes, there is," agreed Creel slowly.

Davis smiled at his expression.

"Don't look so glum," he said. "It doesn't matter, does it? What can't be explained, will have to go without explanation, that's all! It won't hurt anybody."

"I'm not so sure of that!"

"It hasn't hurt anybody yet."

"How about Jimmy?"

"He seemed more normal when he came out of that trance—or whatever it was—than he'd been for a long time."

"That's what scares me," Creel declared. "If he had waked up in a delirium—or if he hadn't waked at all—I wouldn't have been surprised. It would have seemed natural, some way. But to have him look up and say, 'Hullo, fellows!' Why, I nearly fainted myself!"

"It *was* startling," Davis agreed; "but if he is all right again, I don't see what there is to worry about."

"That's just it," Creel pointed out; "I don't believe he *is* all right again. But there's no use talking about it—we've just got to wait and see. And we'd better be getting out of here. It must be away past dinner-time. Hullo! Look there!" he added, in another tone.

He had swung around toward the passage, and the light from his torch flooded its entire length and beat dimly against the wall which blocked its entrance. Now, as I stared at it, it seemed to me that something stood before that wall—a vague shape, a weird shadow—and I had the impression that it was looking at us—looking at us placidly from empty sockets . . .

And then I saw the light reflected on a burnished point, like a jewel . . .

"There *is* something there!" Creel muttered to himself, and started forward.

And then his light went out and I heard the torch rattle on the floor. The next instant, his hand, groping madly, caught mine in a grip that crushed the flesh.

"Who is it?" gasped a voice in my ear—Creel's voice, almost unrecognizable. "Is it you, Jimmy?"

"No," I said; "it's Billy Williams. For God's sake, what's the matter, Creel?"

"There's something here!" he breathed, and his grip tightened. "Something—something knocked that torch out of my hand. Let me hold you."

"Stand still!" called Davis sharply. "I'll find it!"

That was a terrifying moment, with Creel clinging to me . . .

Then the light flashed out again, and Davis stood there, holding the torch. As its beam shot along the passage, we could see the wall quite clearly. There was no shadow upon it. The Thing—if it had ever really existed—had disappeared.

"Come on," said Davis; but Creel held me back for a whispered word.

"Let Davis think I dropped the torch," he said. "I'm ashamed I went to pieces like that!"

And together, in troubled silence, we followed Davis out of the tomb.

CHAPTER XX

DINNER, that night, was a melancholy meal. Davis had been strangely silent ever since we emerged from the tomb, and I wonder now that I did not guess the reason. My only excuse is that I was myself too deeply shaken to observe anything closely. Creel was still obviously agitated by his experience, in spite of an effort to appear at ease—an effort which flickered out almost at once. Ma Creel and Mollie had not yet recovered from the shock of Jimmy's disappearance; and I believe that they suspected something more had happened, though they asked no questions. Perhaps they were afraid to!

As for Mlle. Roland, she was curiously pale, languid, and distrait, with no curiosity whatever, apparently, as to the occurrences of the afternoon. I started to describe to her the opening of the tomb, but I stopped after the second sentence, for it was obvious she did not hear me, and I had a curious feeling that she somehow knew all about it. Indeed, her eyes were so dull and vacant as she glanced up from time to time, that I doubted if she either saw or heard any of us, except dimly and confusedly, as though we were miles away. And as I looked at her, a sudden thought startled me. Could it

be that she was addicted to some drug? Could that be the explanation of her pale face and languid air and lack-lustre eyes? The thought troubled me—and yet left me strangely relieved. If that was all—well, it would be deplorable, of course, but it was, at least, understandable!

Only Jimmy was anything like himself. He was almost feverishly so, and I found his careless unconcern and misplaced jests and determined gaiety more disquieting than the deepest depression would have been. And then that queer look in his eyes—of bravado, of defiance. Surely the heat had touched him—how else *could* he sit there rattling away like that—how else could a man who had gone through what he had gone through that afternoon reel off, one after another, ostensibly for Mlle. Roland's benefit, those stale, moth-eaten stories of the New York studios—stories which had been common to all studios since studios began!—more especially since Mlle. Roland did not smile—did not even listen? It got on all our nerves; but it was Creel who broke down first.

"For heaven's sake, Jimmy," he blurted out, "stop that silly patter! Those stories are a thousand years old!"

"I know it," agreed Jimmy cheerfully; "but I thought perhaps they'd amuse Mlle. Roland."

"Look at her, man; look at her!" said Creel, still more irritably. "Does she seem amused? Why, they'd be chestnuts to Sekenyen-Rē!"

"Sekenyen-Rē?" echoed Mlle. Roland, looking up suddenly with the first appearance of interest she had shown. "Who was he?"

"A king of ancient Egypt," answered Creel. "It's his mummy the professor has found over there in the tomb."

"A mummy? Really?"

"The professor has found a block of granite," Creel explained grimly, "with a football carved on top of it, which he says contains the missing link. We'll see to-morrow, when he opens it, whether it is with or without a tail!"

"You are jesting!" the girl protested, and turned her eyes inquiringly upon Davis; but that worthy refused to be drawn into the discussion, and went on silently with his meal; though a moment later I caught him watching Mlle. Roland furtively. Had the same thought occurred to him, I wondered, that had occurred to me? He was something of a physician, I knew; doubtless his long sojourns in the East had familiarized him with drugs and their effects. I resolved to probe him a little, when I had the chance . . .

Again silence fell like a pall over our party. Mlle. Roland asked no more questions; Jimmy seemed to have been effectually squelched. The blanket of gloom was so thick it was almost suffocating!

Creel got through his meal first, as he almost always did.

"I'll want you, Princess, first thing in the morning, in your harem togs," he said, as he rose; "and you, Jimmy, in your khaki," and then he walked away to the tent, where I saw him presently poring over the manuscript of his scenario by the light of the oil lamp.

I had gone in to get some tobacco, and I tried to slip out without disturbing him; but he heard me and looked up.

"That you, Billy?" he asked. "Come here a minute. Look at that!" and he held the back of his hand out under the light. "See that welt?" and I saw that there was an ugly red welt across the knuckles. "No wonder I dropped the torch, eh?" and he laughed unpleasantly.

I stared down at the welt, scarcely able to believe my eyes. To be sure, Creel had hissed into my ear the statement that the torch had been knocked from his hand—but I hadn't believed it—I had credited it to the hysteria of the moment. But here was tangible evidence . . .

"But look here, Creel," I protested, "nothing could have struck you! There wasn't anything there to strike you! Even if there really was something in the corridor, it was only a sort of grey cloud—and it was too far away . . ."

"I know it!" broke in Creel, testily. "Good heavens, man, do you suppose I haven't told myself all that a hundred times! But there's the welt!"

Yes, there was the welt; there was no denying that!

"You struck your hand against something," I said at last; "against one of those pillars, perhaps—they have sharp corners—or against that block of granite."

"Yes, perhaps I did," said Creel, ironically. "I wish I could think so; but it happens that I know I didn't. However, let it go at that! Run along!" and he turned brusquely back to his manuscript.

I looked around for Mollie, as I came out of the tent, hoping to inveigle her into another *tête-à-tête*; but she was nowhere in sight. In fact, there wasn't anybody in sight, except the natives cleaning up the dinner things; which seemed to me a little queer;

but I could only guess that everybody had found everybody else insupportable, and had fled to their several quarters. I didn't blame them—I felt that way myself!

I felt, in fact, a sudden longing for the desert—for its silence, its solitude, its imperturbability—and instinctively I turned toward the edge of the oasis. A moment later, I almost fell over Mustafa and Jimmy Allen, seated in the shadow of a palm and deep in talk.

"Hello!" said Jimmy, in a tone that meant "Get out!" and I passed on with a nod.

But what could it be that he and Mustafa were discussing so earnestly? The lore of ancient Egypt, its customs and superstitions? I laughed shortly; then put the thought away. After all, what did it matter? What did anything matter? Here was the desert, silent, immutable, scornful of man and his petty troubles. I drew a deep breath, as I stood gazing out across it; then I sat down with my back against a hummock of sand, and lit my pipe, and tried to think things over. But it wasn't any use—there wasn't anything to *think* over—nothing to get hold of—no place to start! The only thing I seemed able to do was to ask myself questions I couldn't answer—or whose answers I was afraid to think of! How was it going to end? What was going to happen?

That something was going to happen—something shocking and decisive, beside which all that had already happened would be mere child's play—I never for an instant doubted!

How still the desert was, how beautiful—and menacing! I pictured to myself the dim processions of caravans which had drifted across it for

thousands and thousands of years, out to this oasis, and then on again, on again. And almost before they had passed, the drifting sand had covered all trace of their passage, and they were as though they had never been.

“Like snow upon the desert’s dusty face . . .”

That was old Omar, and I tried to recall the rest of the stanza, but couldn’t; and then I wondered if there ever was snow on the desert’s dusty face. It seemed improbable . . .

My heart jumped suddenly into my throat, for far out across the sand I fancied I had seen something moving. I strained my eyes through the darkness—yes, there it was, coming nearer; and then I saw it was a man; and then, with a sigh of relief, I recognized the spare figure and white beard of our old Egyptologist.

“Hello, Professor,” I called, as he reached the oasis, a little to my right. “Been out for a walk?”

“That you, Billy?” and he paused a moment.

“Yes; come over and sit down.” I was surprised to find myself very anxious indeed for his company!

He paused a moment longer in indecision; then, to my immense relief, came over and sat down beside me.

“I thought I knew your voice,” he said, and took off the soft hat he always wore after dark in place of his white helmet, and held his face up to the breeze. “I smelt your pipe, away out. It’s remarkable how far the odour of tobacco carries sometimes. I fancied I smelt it to-night away over there at the ruins.”

“My pipe isn’t that strong!” I laughed. “Have you been over there?”

"Yes. I wanted to take another look at the tomb. I don't open a tomb every day!"

"You didn't go by yourself!" I gasped.

"Surely—why not? I had both torches. Queer thing," he added; "mine is working all right again."

"But to go over there alone . . ."

"I *wanted* to be alone," he broke in, impatiently. "I can't do any real thinking with you fellows around. You're afraid of your own shadows!"

I winced at his tone.

"Look here, Professor," I said, "didn't you see anything over there this afternoon?"

"I saw nothing unusual."

"You didn't see someone standing at the end of the corridor?"

"Certainly not! Neither did you."

"Yes, I did," I said. "A sort of grey shadow in front of that white wall . . ."

Davis threw back his head and laughed softly.

"That's just what I was saying!" he cried. "That you were afraid of your own shadow!"

"It wasn't my shadow!" I protested.

"Then it was Creel's or mine! One of the simplest propositions of physics, Billy, is that there can be no shadow unless there is some more or less opaque body to cast it!"

"Oh, I know!" I said, impatiently. And then I resolved to cast a bomb at him. "Creel says something knocked the torch out of his hand."

"Nonsense!" retorted Davis, equably.

"He showed me to-night where he had been struck—a red welt right across the knuckles."

Davis wasn't so prompt with his answer, this time; he combed his beard thoughtfully with his fingers for a moment, staring out across the sand.

"He struck his hand against something," he said, at last.

"So I told him," I agreed eagerly; "but he just laughed at me."

"Well, suppose what he says is true," Davis went on, evenly; "suppose something *did* knock the torch from his hand—what of it? Why should we be frightened? The Egyptians believed that the tombs of the kings were defended by guardian spirits, and that it meant death to rifle or defile them. It was a belief which the kings themselves did everything they could' to foster—for obvious reasons. But most of them have been rifled and defiled, and I never yet heard of anybody dying of it! So to-morrow I open that sarcophagus. Even if I saw a guardian angel standing beside it ready to strike, I would still open it!"

There was something in his manner which sent a little chill over me.

"Then you think," I stammered, "you think . . ."

"That some catastrophe will follow? No, I don't! My reason tells me that such a fear is absurd."

"But there is something deeper than reason," I began.

"No, there isn't!" he broke in sharply. "The moment you admit that, you set yourself adrift; you deliver yourself over, bound hand and foot, to all the old fears and superstitions which have come down to us through the ages—which are more or less born into our blood. It is just that sort of ignorance we've got to struggle away from!"

"You talk as though you were trying to convince yourself," I said.

"I am," he admitted. "Good Lord, man, it's in my blood too! But I'd be ashamed to yield to

it. I'd feel like a traitor to civilization! By heaven, we *are* traitors, every time we permit ourselves to yield to unreasoning fear! If any catastrophe *does* happen . . ."

"Well?" I asked, as he paused.

"It's nonsense even to suppose such a thing," he said, savagely, and got quickly to his feet. "Good-night!" And he strode away between the palms.

I filled my pipe again, feeling unaccountably cheered and heartened, and settled back for a final quiet smoke before turning in. Davis was a great old boy, and he was right—a man *was* a traitor who yielded to unreasoning fear! He was permitting himself to slip back toward the Dark Ages; he was making the fight just so much harder for the next generation; and every time he conquered, he was making that fight easier—he was helping to overcome the devils of ignorance and superstition . . .

And just then, I happened to glance aside, and there, at the edge of the oasis, not twenty yards away, stood the figure of a man. I had heard no sound, and seeing him there suddenly like that gave me an awful start; but I am glad to say that I won *that* fight, for I fought back the impulse to jump to my feet, and looked at him again—and recognized Jimmy Allen.

He was gazing out across the desert toward the ruins, as though expecting some one. At least, that was the impression his attitude gave me. Once he took a few steps forward into the sand, and then thought better of it and came back, and stood there in the long grass, tense and expectant, staring out across the waste.

At last I could stand it no longer, and I knocked out my pipe loudly against my heel.

"Why, hello, Jimmy," I said, as he started around toward me at the sound. "What are *you* doing out here?"

"What are *you* doing?" he demanded, with what seemed to me unnecessary fierceness, and he strode over and stood above me in a manner which can only be described as threatening.

"I came out for a quiet smoke," I said. "I was just going to turn in."

"How long have you been here?"

"Oh, quite a while. Ever since I stumbled over you and Mustafa back yonder."

"Have you—have you seen anyone?" he asked, peering down at me.

"Why, yes—I saw Davis."

"Davis?"

"He'd been over at the ruins nosing around," I explained. "I saw him when he came back. He sat down and talked for a few minutes."

I could hear Jimmy's quick breath of relief.

"So it was Davis," he said, and dropped to the sand beside me.

"Who did you think it was?" I demanded.

"I didn't know—I saw something moving out across the sand quite a while ago—and I thought—I fancied—anyway, I had a good notion to go over there and see for myself."

"Over to the ruins?"

"Yes, and into the tomb—there's a fascination about it . . ."

He stopped and gazed out across the sand. It seemed to me that this was worth another pipe, so I filled up.

"Yes, there is a fascination about it," I agreed at last, "but it's a fascination a fellow ought to fight against . . ."

"Why?" Jimmy broke in.

"I don't know," I stammered. "It may lead too far. And Davis says that every time we yield to unreasoning fear, we're sliding back . . ."

"And Davis is right!" rapped in Jimmy. "It's you who are yielding to unreasoning fear, not I. You fear this fascination because it leads to the unknown—but why should one be afraid of the unknown?"

I could only shake my head helplessly. Of course he was right—only fools and cowards were afraid of the unknown! And yet there was about his attitude something morbid, something unhealthy . . .

"I feel that I shall never be afraid again," Jimmy added, after a moment. "Never again—whatever happens!"

So that was the change we had sensed in him—he had shaken off fear.

"You mean that you have been afraid?" I asked.

"Oh, desperately. It wasn't the heat, Billy, that sent me off like that. It was fear—fear and bewilderment—a sort of feeling that Fate had brought me here after the lapse of centuries for some awful purpose of its own. I seemed to recognize this oasis; the first time I looked down into that excavation, it somehow looked familiar; when we dug out that ghastly mummy, I knew that I had seen it before . . ."

"Of course you had seen it before!" I broke in.

"No, I hadn't. I'd never laid eyes on it till Creel and I dragged it out of that hole."

"It was manufactured in our workrooms about a month ago," I pointed out, "so if you mean you had seen it out here, or in some former existence, or anything of that sort—why, it's ridiculous!"

"I know it," Jimmy agreed. "Perhaps it was one like it—I suppose they all look alike. But the biggest shock was when we laid it on the sand, and I stared down at it, and saw it change . . ."

He passed his hand before his eyes, and let the sentence trail away into nothingness.

"The trouble with you is," I said brusquely, "that this infernal picture has got on your brain. You've moiled over it so much that you are beginning to think it's true, and to imagine you really see what you are only supposed to see! It makes your acting better than I ever knew it—I'll say that—but it must be blamed hard on your nerves!"

"You may be right," Jimmy agreed. "As a matter of fact, I suppose you *are* right. But all that was nothing to the sensation I had when I crawled through that hole this afternoon—and it had nothing to do with the picture, either!"

"I could see that you were scared," I said.

"Scared! Scared isn't the name for it. I was in a blue funk. It was all I could do to claw my way through that hole, because I knew, clear to the bottom of my soul, that it was my own tomb I was entering, and that something was waiting for me inside."

I felt the desert chill strike into me, and I snuggled back closer into the sand.

"Well, was there?" I asked, in a voice I tried vainly to make unconcerned.

"Yes," answered Jimmy, in a low tone, "there was."

"What was it?" I asked, and all pretence had fallen away—I had slipped back shamefully into unreasoning fear!—and my voice was only a hoarse whisper.

"I don't know what it was," answered Jimmy, quietly; "but I know that it took me by the hand, as if in welcome, and raised me from the place where I had fallen, and led me through that narrow door, and along that corridor, to the spot where I lay buried; and it said to me, 'Kneel here!' . . ."

He broke off suddenly, and rubbed his head bewilderedly.

"There's a crook somewhere," he said; "I can't think straight—I can't disentangle reality from unreality—it's all mixed up. Do you suppose I'm going mad, Billy?"

"Mad?" I echoed. "Nonsense, man!"

But there was a chill in my blood; perhaps that was it!

"My mind seems extraordinarily lucid," he added, "and all my senses seem somehow more acute. That's one reason I wanted to go over there to-night—I could see things and hear things and smell things . . ."

"Nonsense!" I said again, and rose abruptly—he'd be asking me to accompany him, next! "You're going to bed—that's where you're going. We've all of us got a hard day ahead to-morrow, and we'll need all the rest we can get. Come along!"

He rose with an obedience that surprised me.

"Whether I'm mad or not," he said, as we started back, "there's one thing I'll promise you—I'll never be afraid again!"

CHAPTER XXI

HE was as good as his word. Whatever he was after that—malign, demoniac, possessed—I am sure that not for one instant was he afraid. Right up to the end of the chapter, he carried a brave front—even a reckless one. Perhaps, in the final hour, when he found himself alone . . .

Next morning, while Davis and two or three of the natives were chipping away at the cemented lid of the sarcophagus of Sekenyen-Rē, we made a re-take of the discovery of the mummy, and Jimmy went through the whole gruesome programme without a shiver. The mummy was lifted through the hole, and then Jimmy entered, while Creel, again in khaki in the character of first assistant explorer, posed the natives, with the invaluable assistance of Mustafa. The scene, of course, was to follow immediately the one we had taken the day before, when Jimmy entered the tomb, and the audiences that viewed the picture would never suspect the exciting events which had occurred between !

Creel got everything ready, at last, and gave me the signal, and I started cranking, and then he went forward and peered through the hole ; and then he backed away, and Jimmy appeared in the opening, with the mummy in his arms. He held it closely,

even lovingly, and as he passed it out to Creel and Mustafa, he cast a glance which I can only describe as exultant at Mlle. Roland, who was waiting, attired in her harem costume, to do the vision. Her attitude was one of calm detachment, as though the proceedings rather bored her ; but Jimmy's eyes were shining as though he had somehow won a great victory.

Then the mummy was laid on the ground, and he went through the business of staring down at it, and tumbling in a faint ; but he didn't do it half so convincingly as he had the day before ! I don't mean to say he didn't do it well—Jimmy was too good an actor to do anything badly—but his performance lacked the gripping, hair-raising reality which it had possessed before. Then it had given me the shivers—now I watched it quite unconcerned.

It wasn't till Mlle. Roland came forward to do the double-exposure that I saw how pale she was. Creel noticed it too.

"Aren't you well ? " he asked.

"Oh, yes, thank you, I am quite well," she answered, and took her place on the sand.

"For heaven's sake, don't *you* get to falling over ! "

"Do not fear ; I am not of that sort," and she smiled up at him much as she was supposed to smile up at Jimmy.

Creel stood looking down at her for a moment with a puzzled face—perhaps it was the jibe at Jimmy which puzzled him !—then he turned away abruptly.

"All right, Billy," he said, and I made the double-exposure, just as I had the first time.

Then we did a short scene of four natives carrying away the unconscious Jimmy, while the girl,

materializing apparently out of the body of the mummy, sat up and leered after him in triumph—and, heavens, the way she did it! Then, as the sun had grown uncomfortably hot, we went over to the oasis, and gathered up Ma Creel and Mollie, and did two or three fillers with the palms and the native camp as backgrounds; and finally Creel dismissed us with the injunction to be ready at three o'clock in Oriental costume.

I knew that he was going to do the burying-alive scene—the biggest scene of the film, upon which its success would very largely depend—and I soon realized that he was nervous over it, for he actually came and asked me for advice—me, the camera-man!—as I was putting away my box.

“I don't half like the idea of those natives handling the Princess,” he said; “especially in that harem rig. You remember how they looked at her.”

“Do they have to handle her?” I asked.

“Well, naturally, there has to be a struggle. She's not going to let herself be put inside that tomb without a fight. Of course, from the picture point of view, the more brutal the fight is the better—I'm afraid it will get too brutal.”

“If we had some swords or spears . . .”

But Creel shook his head impatiently.

“That wouldn't do. She'd throw herself on the spears rather than be buried alive. Anybody would! No—she's got to be handled roughly—damn roughly! This is the big scene, and we've got to put it over. What the king would really have done would be to have his men strip her naked, and lash her with whips into the tomb. We can't go that far, of course, but we've got to get as close to it as we dare!”

"You'd better find out how much the Princess will stand for," I suggested.

"Oh, I'm not afraid of that—she's an artist—she'll stand for whatever is necessary. Digby can do most of it, with Mustafa to help. I think we can trust Mustafa. If that isn't enough, I'll have to put on a coat of bronze myself. Come along and let's look over the ground. You don't mind the sun, do you?"

"No," I said; "I seem to be sun-proof;" and Creel summoned Digby, and together we walked over to the excavation.

The natives had knocked off work, but Mustafa routed out a couple for us, and under Creel's direction, the entrance to the tomb was squared up, and the stones to fill the opening were piled up neatly close at hand.

"We'll have to have something for mortar," said Creel; "black mortar like that in the wall."

"Sand and water will do," said Digby. "I can darken it with some lamp-black."

"All right," Creel agreed. "You didn't forget those trowels, did you?"

"Sure not," said Digby, who never forgot anything.

"There's one place up there where the masonry's broken. You'd better have that repaired, Mustafa, and then have the whole front of the tomb scrubbed off, so that it will look clean and new. And sweep up all this debris. I want it to look as it did four thousand years ago, when it was first built."

"Vurry good, saar," said Mustafa, and sent a native off for brooms and water.

"This stone with the oval in it," Creel added, "will be the last one in—the seal, as it were, closing

up the tomb. You want to do some figuring, Digby, so that it will fit in properly. Do you know anything about masonry ? ”

“ I know enough to pull off this job,” Digby assured him. “ I’ll pile up the stones the way they go—it ought to be easy, then.”

“ That’s right,” Creel agreed. “ And of course, if you get stuck, we can stop camera. And get your props ready, Digby—we’ll want the whole outfit, you know, to make the scene as impressive as possible. And get the sand cleaned off those steps, Mustafa—I want to take one scene there. If we had a strip of carpet . . . ”

“ I’ve got one,” said Digby. “ I put it in on the chance we’d need it.”

“ Good for you ! Lay it from the steps over to the tomb ; and spread some rugs here for the king to stand on. It wouldn’t hurt to rig up a square of painted canvas for a shelter.”

“ All right,” said Digby, and hurried away to carry out these multifarious instructions.

“ I don’t know what I’d do without Digby,” said Creel, looking after him. Then he turned back to the tomb. “ Come along ; let’s see what the professor’s doing.”

I hadn’t seen Davis all morning—he had risen ahead of all of us, and had been too busy since to waste any time watching our performance. I knew what he was at, for intermittently I had caught the sound of his chisels chipping at the sarcophagus. Now, as we climbed through the hole, the sound came clearer and louder.

“ If he does find a coffin in that thing, he’ll have to tear this wall down before he can get it out,” Creel remarked, as we squeezed through the narrow

passage into the corridor. "Gracious, but it's hot in here!" he added, and indeed the atmosphere was more stifling than I had ever felt it. "I don't see how Davis stands it. Look at him, working like a slave . . ."

He was crouched beside the sarcophagus, in a position which must have been acutely uncomfortable, and hammering away at the cement by the light of a torch held by one of the natives. He paused to wipe away the perspiration, as we came in, saw us, and greeted us cheerfully.

"I'll have it open by evening," he said, and showed us where the adamantine cement had been chiselled away for about half the length of the lid. "This is certainly the hardest stuff I ever tackled."

Three natives were helping him, and the impact of their chisels was of steel on steel.

"I'm going to do the burying-alive scene this afternoon," said Creel, "and we'll have to wall up that hole out there for a few minutes; but I guess you won't suffocate."

"No, of course not," Davis agreed. "Go ahead."

"Also I'll have to use about all the natives."

"All right. I can't use them in here," and he bent again to his task.

Creel watched him for a moment curiously.

"You really expect to find a mummy in there?" he asked.

"A mummy—yes—and much more," said Davis, between blows. "I hope to prove whether the book of Genesis is true or false."

Creel whistled softly.

"Come along, Billy," he said. "We'd better be off about our picayune affairs. This is too big for us!"

Davis answered with a short laugh.

"It is big," he agreed.

"Too big, I suppose," continued Creel, "to permit your stopping for lunch."

"Is it time for lunch?" and Davis looked up in surprise.

"It's almost noon."

Davis straightened his back slowly, laid his hammer and chisel regretfully on top of the sarcophagus, and mopped the sweat from his face.

"I might have guessed it by the heat," he said, and dismissed the natives, who scampered off with an alacrity which showed that they, at least, had not been oblivious to the passage of time and the pangs of hunger. "I didn't realize how tired I was," he added. "This sort of work takes it out of a fellow. It's a mistake to overdo it."

"Yes, it is," agreed Creel; "it's a mistake to overdo anything. You think you'll be ready to open that thing to-night?"

"Yes—there is only four or five hours' more work on it."

"And after that you are going to tear down that door with the 'Keep Out!' sign on it?"

"Yes," and Davis cast an amused glance toward the symbol of warning cut in the farther wall.

Creel hesitated a minute.

"You haven't seen any more ghosts?" he asked at last, in a tone he tried vainly to render merely casual.

"I haven't seen any at all," snapped Davis. "I never saw a ghost—I don't believe in them."

"Neither do I," said Creel slowly. "At least, I didn't think I did—but yesterday . . ."

"Do you really believe some one knocked that torch out of your hand?" Davis demanded.

"Did Billy tell you that?" asked Creel, and cast me a reproachful glance. "As a matter of fact, I don't know what happened. At the time, I would have sworn that it was knocked out of my hand—and there was an ugly welt across my knuckles to prove it. But I've thought about it a good deal since, and of course it *does* seem absurd. Perhaps I *did* knock my hand against something—though what I could have knocked it against beats me. I was standing right here—you can see for yourself I wasn't within reach of anything . . ."

He stopped suddenly, his eyes on the floor. For Davis, with a sardonic smile, had turned the ray of his torch upon a jagged fragment of stone which lay almost at his feet—a stone which would weigh four or five pounds; and then he pointed his torch toward the roof, and we saw the hole from which the fragment had fallen.

"There's your ghost," he said dryly. "No wonder it raised a welt!"

Creel stared at the stone a moment longer; then he stooped and picked it up and weighed it in his hand, and examined its sharp edges. Finally he cast it away into a corner of the tomb.

"No doubt you are right," he agreed; "and I suppose I seem an awful fool to you. Nevertheless, there's one thing I want to say, and it is this: I understand in a dim way what you hope to find in this sarcophagus; it's a big thing—a tremendous thing—worth running some risk for . . ."

"What risk?" demanded Davis.

"I don't know; but I feel somehow that there is a risk . . ."

"Rubbish!" Davis broke in. "Even if there were, do you suppose I . . ."

"No, I don't," said Creel; "and I wouldn't ask you to. I'd take it myself. In fact, before you raise the lid, I hope you will invite me to be present."

"All right; I will," Davis agreed. "But what is it you're driving at?"

"What I'm driving at is this," said Creel, speaking with visible effort; "I feel, somehow, that the risk you run in opening this sarcophagus, great as it is, isn't a thousandth part of the risk you'll take if you tear down that door back yonder."

Davis stared at him.

"Nonsense, man!" he cried. "You're not developing a case of nerves, too!"

"Oh, Jimmy has got over his!" said Creel. "You should have seen him this morning hugging that mummy—quite as if he liked it! No, it isn't nerves—it is something deeper. What do you expect to find behind that door?"

"I don't know," answered Davis; "but I do know one thing, and it is this: there is something there—something unusual—something terrible, perhaps. That sign was never used without good reason. No Egyptian would dare disregard it."

"Ah, you see," Creel began.

"But I am not an Egyptian," Davis broke in, "I'm a scientist—I have left those old superstitions behind me. That sign, instead of warning me away, lures me on. I am determined to see what is behind that door!"

His eyes were shining with excitement. Creel gazed into them a moment without speaking.

"I see," he said, at last. "I dare say I should feel the same way, in your place. Well, let's go to lunch," and he turned away toward the corridor.

CHAPTER XXI¹

CREEL and Mustafa had a strenuous time, that afternoon, getting our cohort of natives into shape. They were so excited by the prospect of dressing up in masquerade that they behaved like a lot of children.

Mustafa opened the proceedings by an oration in what I suppose was Arabic, and the fellahin listened respectfully, squatted in a semicircle before him. It was the first time I had had occasion to observe them *en masse* and closely, and I was struck by their strange similarity of appearance—a similarity much greater than that of negroes or even Chinamen. The almond-shaped eyes, with their thick fringe of lashes, the smooth straight eyebrows, the wide-lipped mouth, the high cheek-bones, the receding forehead, the broad flat nose—all these gave to that circle of bronze faces a uniformity almost startling, especially since every face was crowned with a close-fitting skull-cap, converted into a sort of turban by winding a strip of dirty white cloth around it; and add to this the fact that their bodies, thin almost to emaciation, were all clothed alike in long brown smocks and baggy white trousers—why, it almost seemed as if Mustafa's audience was composed not of fifty men, but of fifty replicas of the same man!

They listened to the dragoman's remarks in silence and with impassive faces until, toward the end, he rose to what I supposed to be a more impassioned flight, for then they grinned and nodded approval, and chattered to each other like a lot of blackbirds. I found out afterwards that what had won this applause was not any trick of oratory, but the promise of an extra hundred piastres for the crowd, if it would do faithfully what was required of it. A hundred piastres runs all the way to five dollars, and Creel afterwards paid it cheerfully.

But our troubles were just beginning. The natives, under the stimulus of this brilliant reward, were willing enough and donned joyously the gorgeous raiment prepared for them, but to get them to do what we wanted them to do brought Creel to the verge of hysteria. All credit to him that he finally succeeded, except when . . . but I mustn't get ahead of my story.

The first scene we took was in front of the tent, showing the erstwhile favourite being dragged away to her fate, while the king looked cynically on, with his eunuchs and other minions in the background. Digby and Mustafa did the dragging, and they had their hands so full that it looked to me as though Creel would have to don that coat of bronze and help!

From the instant Mlle. Roland came in sight between her captors, I knew we were in for an afternoon of excitement. Her face was deathly pale, her eyes filmed with horror, her whole being vibrant with desperate agony. I have never seen a glance more heartrending than that she cast at Jimmy; but his cynical smile did not waver and he urged her executioners on. The effect on the natives

was extraordinary—just the effect we wanted, as Creel observed delightedly, for they moved uneasily, staring with open mouths, evidently divided between fear of Jimmy, who looked very regal indeed in his purple robes, and sympathy for his victim, who had never seemed more beautiful.

“Great!” said Creel, when the scene was finished, and Mlle. Roland stood pale and panting, while Mustafa scraped the sweat from his face with a hooked finger. (Poor Digby didn’t dare wipe his, for fear the bronze would come off!) “It couldn’t be better, Princess. Now we’ll take another, out at the edge of the oasis.”

She walked away without answering, and there was something in her face which made me vaguely uneasy—the same look which Jimmy’s face had had the day before—a look which seemed to say that this wasn’t acting at all, but grim reality. And there was something in the look which Jimmy sent after her I didn’t like, either—a kind of infernal gloating . . .

I got my camera set up with a beautiful clump of palms as a background, while Creel and Mustafa marshalled the players, and then we did a scene with the whole crowd starting across the desert toward the tomb. The Princess had ceased struggling, and walked with drooping shoulders and bowed head, as though she recognized the uselessness of resistance. As she passed the camera, she looked straight into it with the most tragic glance I ever saw. To look into the camera is usually an error of technique; but it wasn’t in this case. I could guess how that glance would thrill the audience!

Then we did a third scene on the steps—a terrific close-up; for when she reached the steps, and

looked across the court, and saw the open tomb waiting to receive her, she was like a mad woman, shrieking, clawing, writhing . . .

It was only by putting forth their utmost strength that Digby and Mustafa managed to drag her down.

"Look here," I heard Digby pant, "we can't help hurting you, you know, if you don't let up a little!"

But she didn't let up—only looked at him as though he had uttered an insult, and spat in his face; and I fancied I could see Digby go pale under his bronze as he bit his lips and dragged her on; and I heard something else that sent a chill over me—a sort of guttural murmur from the natives, as they realized what was about to happen.

Digby and Mustafa had dropped their prisoner the instant the scene was over, and when I got down the steps, she was leaning against the wall with staring eyes, her lips drawn back in an ugly snarl, her bosom rising and falling convulsively. To me she seemed on the verge of collapse—but she didn't even look at me when I asked her if there was anything I could do—just stood there, clutching at the wall for support, and staring toward the tomb . . .

Digby and Mustafa were expostulating with Creel.

"My God, saar," said Mustafa, "it iss too much—I cannot do it!"

"She spat in my face!" growled Digby.

"Oh, shut up!" snapped Creel. "It was great—consummate! Suppose she *did* spit in your face? That won't hurt you! No—don't you dare wipe it off!"

"But I don't like it. It's going too far! It's not right!"

"It's gloriously right!"

"But, saar," Mustafa protested, "the fellahin—they not understand. They make trouble."

"Trouble?"

"Did you not hear them? It iss bad when they make that noise—vurry bad! They think she iss to be killed!"

"Oh, well, explain that it is only make-believe," said Creel impatiently. "I thought they understood that!"

"It iss impossible," said Mustafa, "for them to understand. It iss something beyond them."

"Promise them another hundred piastres, then," said Creel, and while Mustafa began another oration to the excited natives, he walked over to Mlle. Roland. "It is perfectly gorgeous, Princess!" he said, and I saw that he himself was too excited to notice how near prostration she was. "It's the greatest scene I ever filmed! If you can only keep it up . . ."

She looked at him strangely, without replying, and he might have noticed something then, had not Mustafa hurried up, rubbing his hands.

"It iss all right, saar," he said. "What do we do now?"

"Line them up in front of the tomb, along the carpet. Put your camera here, Billy. Jimmy, stand here under the shelter. Ready? Now, Princess the final struggle. Get hold of her, Digby; get hold of her, Mustafa. Shove her into the tomb!"

It must be by a sort of sixth sense a camera-man grinds out his foot a second; at least, when that scene was over, I could not remember that I had cranked at all, and for an instant turned sick and dizzy; but when I glanced at my indicator, I saw it was all right. . .

I thought they would break her wrists, dragging her forward. She dug her heels into the sand, she tried to throw herself prostrate, she twined herself about the men—and such cries, such shrieks . . .

And then, when they got her to the tomb, she wrenched herself free and sprang at Jimmy, who stood looking coldly on, and I verily believe she would have clawed his eyes out if Digby and Mustafa had not seized her and dragged her back.

And then she begged for mercy, the tears streaming down her face . . .

“Look—I am young—I am beautiful—see this body, so soft and tender—so full of delight—and it is yours—yours . . .”

I swear I came within an ace of rushing forward and rescuing her myself! And I could have torn Jimmy limb from limb when he shook his head and motioned her away . . .

And then the struggle began again, more terrible than ever; and I saw her bend swiftly and sink her teeth into Mustafa's arm; and I saw the purple rage which flashed into his face, as he whirled her from her feet and thrust her into the tomb . . .

“Bring your box up here, Billy,” cried Creel. “Now, Digby, quick—the stones!”

And Digby, with shaking hands, began to set in place the stones which Mustafa handed up to him.

Once her face appeared at the opening, livid—scarcely a living face—and Mustafa thrust it back into the darkness with one ruthless blow; and then all the stones were in but the last square one, with its oval cartouche—and through the hole her hands were thrust, begging, imploring for mercy, and I could hear her voice, faint and inarticulate . . .

Digby hesitated, the stone in his hands, and

glanced at Jimmy. It was the supreme touch,—how it would register!—and Jimmy nodded coldly.

“Put it in!” he said; and Digby dabbed it with the black mortar and thrust it into place.

“Now,” cried Creel, “walk slowly away, all of you, out of the picture . . .”

But that touch was destined never to be added, for with a hoarse cry, the fellahin swept over us, and began to claw frantically at that sealed opening.

“Crank, Billy, crank!” yelled Creel, and he told me afterwards that the thought had flashed into his head that he might use the scene somehow—but he never did. I saw it the other day, when we were testing out the film, and even on the screen, it gave me the horrors, for it brought that frantic minute so clearly back to me . . .

I cranked away during the sixty seconds it took those desperate blacks to claw those stones out again . . .

“By God, saar, she bit me!” I heard Mustafa saying, and saw that a dark stain was spreading across his white sleeve. “She iss no woman—she iss a devil! She should stay in there!”

“Davis and three or four men are in there, too,” answered Creel, with a smile. “We can’t very well abandon them! Anyway, those blacks of yours have settled the matter. They’ve got the stones out—call them off, Mustafa, and get those clothes off them before they’re torn to shreds. My wife will dress your wound—and I’ll give you ten dollars extra into the bargain . . .”

Mustafa’s face, which had been sullen and threatening, cleared as if by magic, and he waded into his men with some of the most energetic language I ever heard. And such is the force of habit, ingrained

through long centuries of oppression, that his men slunk back and pulled off their gay attire and piled it in a heap under Digby's direction. But they were evidently not satisfied, for they hung about the border of the excavation, watching sullenly to see what would happen next.

For Mlle. Roland had not reappeared at the opening in the tomb.

I had expected to see her standing there, the instant the stones were pulled away, pale, panting and triumphant—but there was only the blackness of the tomb; and then Creel ran forward and disappeared inside. And then, as I unslung my camera with trembling hands—for I knew that it would not be needed again that day!—I was astonished to see Jimmy in all his war-paint as king of Egypt, calmly mounting the steps out of the excavation, as though he had no possible concern in the girl's fate. Or as though he knew that fate was settled—that he had buried her alive and was leaving her to die! That was what his look seemed to say, so cruel and impassive . . .

Then Creel's face reappeared at the opening.

"Turn your box over to Digby, Billy," he called, "and come here."

A moment later, I was clambering through the opening.

"No, no!" called Creel's voice. "Stay outside—wait a minute!"

"What's the matter?" I gasped.

"Nothing serious; the Princess has fainted," and then he came toward me out of the darkness with the girl in his arms. "Take her when I lift her up to you—she's not heavy."

As I bent forward and passed my arms under her

knees and shoulders, I caught, from within the tomb, the regular chip-chipping of Davis's chisel; and I shivered, for there was something curiously ominous in the sound—as though he were closing a sepulchre instead of opening one. And then the light fell on the girl's face, and I stared down at it in horror.

"She's dead, Creel!" I gasped, for it was ghastly, and across one cheek was an ugly bruise, already turning blue.

"Nonsense!" snapped Creel. "Don't lose your nerve, Billy," and he clambered through. "Mustafa," he called, "you will tell your men that the lady has fainted, but will soon be all right again. Then help Digby bring that stuff over to the tent. Now, give her to me, Billy," and he lifted her from my arms. "You bring your camera. We've got to guard that film—we'll never make another like it—not if we live a thousand years!"

As we mounted the steps, we could hear Mustafa imparting Creel's assurance to his men—that the lady had only fainted. But had she? As I looked down at her, lying so limp and ghastly in Creel's arms, I was shaken again by a great fear.

"Look at that bruise, Creel," I whispered. "Do you suppose that was where Mustafa struck her?"

"I shouldn't be surprised," said Creel, grimly. "It's an ugly bruise, I know—but the film was worth it. I know she'll think so! The bruise will heal in a day or two, but that scene will make her famous! And maybe it wasn't Mustafa at all—maybe she struck it when she fell. Anyway, she hasn't anything to complain of—she buried her teeth in his arm."

"I know," I said. "I saw it. Do you think—it was—just acting?"

"No," said Creel shortly. "It was better than acting. I think she went mad—I think she imagined she was really being buried alive; maybe that's her method—to let herself go."

"She made my flesh creep!" I said.

"It was gorgeous," Creel agreed; "and this is the reaction. It was bound to come."

I glanced again at the ghastly face.

"If she only comes around all right," I began.

"Of course she'll come around all right," broke in Creel angrily. "A little ammonia, or something of that sort. My wife will know what to do—women are used to this sort of thing."

And indeed Ma Creel took charge of the case in a matter-of-course way which was most reassuring.

"You men run along," she said, after Creel had laid the girl on the bed. "You're only in the way here. But I'm surprised at you, Warrie, letting her work herself into this state."

"Letting her!" echoed Creel. "Why, good lord, Mary, I couldn't have stopped her if I'd wanted to. She was like a wild-cat!"

"It's a shame, just the same! What made that bruise on her cheek?"

"I guess she struck it when she fainted," said Creel.

"Well, all I can say is I'm ashamed of you! Now you and Billy get out of here. Mollie and I will look after her."

Creel and I left the tent like a pair of criminals. Outside we came upon Jimmy, stretched at his ease in a canvas lounging-chair, and smoking a cigarette. To my surprise, he still wore his Oriental costume, though it must have been suffocatingly hot.

"You can get out of those togs, Jimmy," said

Creel, shortly. "We're through for to-day. I thought you understood."

"I wanted to be sure," said Jimmy. "It's an infernal nuisance getting into this rig. Mlle. Roland all right?" he asked carelessly.

"She fainted," said Creel. "That final scene was too much for her. You certainly took it coolly enough."

"Oh, yes," said Jimmy; "I've got past the fainting stage."

Creel shot him a curious glance; as for me, I turned away with something very like disgust, for the conviction suddenly flashed upon me that his callousness during the burial scene had not been assumed; that he would have looked on just as calmly if it had been in deadly earnest instead of make-believe . . .

I went over to the property-tent and sealed up the film in an air-tight case, and labelled it. The heat made me a little uneasy about all the films. If anything should happen to them—but I didn't dare think of it.

Jimmy came in as I was putting my camera away, and began to strip off his robes, whistling softly under his breath. The sound enraged me, and I was about to tell him so, when Creel called me from outside.

"Billy!"

"Yes," I answered.

"Davis has sent word that he's ready to open the sarcophagus. Don't you want to go over?"

"I surely do!" I said, and hurried out and joined him.

Davis was waiting for us at the entrance to the tomb, his face convulsed with excitement.

"Come along!" he cried; "I've got the lid loose—I wouldn't have waited much longer!"

He led the way along the passage into the inner chamber. Four natives were waiting there, armed with long crowbars, and at a sign from Davis, they set to work prying up the great granite lid. Slowly it rose—an inch—two inches—and I caught a sudden gust of spicy perfume . . .

"Now, slide it over!" said Davis, hoarsely, and I could judge of his excitement by the way my own heart was hammering in my throat. "Careful! Careful!" And then he was clinging to the edge of the sarcophagus, staring down into it. "I've found it!" he whispered hoarsely. "By heaven, I've found it!"

For an instant I was dazzled by the glow of light and colour which burst from within the tomb, under the rays of the torches; then I saw something vaguely like a human form, gilt from top to bottom; and a face staring up at me with wide-open eyes . . .

"Look at it!" gasped Creel. "Look at it!" And he pointed at the face with a shaking finger.

And my heart turned to ice within me, for the face was the face of Jimmy Allen!

CHAPTER XXIII

OF the moment that followed I have no distinct recollection. I vaguely remember clinging to Creel, and I could feel his vice-like grip on my arm ; and I suppose I must have closed my eyes, for when I opened them and looked again down into that staring face, that startling likeness had vanished. All that lay there was a dark-hued countenance, with wide-open eyes of glass gazing placidly up at us. It was like a dissolving view, or a puzzle picture, which changes as one looks at it.

Then I saw that it was not the mummy I was staring at, but the outer case, or coffin, moulded to the lines of the human form inside it ; and that it was upon one end of this outer case that the face—a portrait, presumably, of the man whose body lay within—had been carved and then carefully painted.

“ Did you see it ? ” asked Creel, relaxing his grip and wiping the sweat from his face.

I nodded mutely.

“ See what ? ” demanded Davis.

“ The first glimpse I had of that face,” said Creel, “ I’d have sworn it was Jimmy Allen.”

Davis squinted down at it.

“ It’s a portrait of Sekenyen-Rē,” he said, “ if this

is really his mummy ; and it doesn't look the least like Allen." Then he looked at it again, and I could see by his startled expression that he had caught the likeness. "By George, it does, though!" he said.

"Better not let Jimmy see it," said Creel. "It will only send him off again."

"Better not let Jimmy see what?" demanded a voice, and there was Jimmy behind us. "I heard Creel invite Billy over," he explained to Davis, "and I came too, as soon as I got off my war-paint. I hope you don't mind?"

"Not at all," Davis assured him, and turned back to an inspection of the coffin.

"Now," said Jimmy to Creel, "what was it I wasn't to see?"

"Oh, nothing!" said Creel nervously.

"What was it, Billy?" asked Jimmy, turning to me. "Come, I'm not a child. What was it?"

"When we first saw it," I explained, "we thought that face painted on the coffin looked a little like you. Of course it doesn't really . . ."

"Why shouldn't it look like me?" asked Jimmy, quietly. "It was intended for me."

We could only stare at him with open mouths—even Davis!

"And I think it is a pretty good likeness, all things considered," he added, looking down at it.

Creel got back enough of his self-control to laugh—a pretty hollow laugh it was, but nevertheless it could be recognized as being intended for a sign of amusement.

"They gave you a swell coffin!" he commented.

"Yes," said Jimmy simply, "that I couldn't prevent—any more than I could prevent that magniloquent description of my greatness which they

inscribed along the sides. But the sarcophagus—all this,” and he waved his hand around at the barren walls, “I myself prepared a year before I died. That was my expiation—a million years in hell! But it wasn’t enough, it seems!”

“Expiation for what?” demanded Creel.

“For walling her up alive,” said Jimmy, and for an instant inclined a listening ear toward the rear wall of the tomb, as I had seen him do once before. Then, with a faint smile, he turned back to the coffin, and gazed down at it meditatively.

Davis was looking at him with a sort of double-concentrated attention; Creel was staring, a twisted smile still on his lips; as for me—I knew what had happened—I had feared it the night before—Jimmy had gone mad!

“But that’s all make-believe!” Creel burst out, at last. “That’s just the story we’re filming.”

“Is it?” asked Jimmy, and brushed his hand before his eyes in a bewildered way. “Perhaps it is—I don’t seem to be able to keep them apart any more—the real and the unreal.” Then he shook his head sharply. “No—it’s true!” he said. “She kept on asking for love—for love! Her arms were always around me like a prison! At last I couldn’t stand it any longer—she tried to kill me, one day, because I took another woman; and I walled her up back there, so she couldn’t bother me any more,” and he nodded toward the rear wall, with its sinister sign of warning. “I was sorry afterwards,” he added in a lower tone; “but it was too late. And she *did* bother me—for she never died—just waited on and on . . .”

His voice trailed away, and he looked down again at the coffin, his lips trembling.

We stared at the wall and we stared at Jimmy, and I, at least, was convinced that when that wall was opened, the body of his victim—or what was left of it—would be found there. As for her never dying, that, of course, was nonsense. She would be dead enough, and dried into some such hideous thing as Creel had fabricated . . .

I glanced at Davis, to find him combing his beard thoughtfully, as he looked at Jimmy without any sign of surprise or perturbation. And at last, Jimmy, with a final look at the coffin, turned and walked silently out of the tomb.

“What do you think of him, Professor?” Creel demanded, when the sound of his footsteps had died away down the passage.

“He has been worrying over that picture too much,” said Davis. “He said himself that he couldn’t separate the imaginary from the real. The heat no doubt is what started the trouble. And then he’s rather mad about that Frenchwoman, isn’t he?”

“You mean his mind is gone?”

“Oh, not so bad as that—just a mild mania. He will be all right again, once he’s through with the picture and away from here.”

“Then you don’t believe . . .”

Creel didn’t finish the sentence, but the glance he cast at the rear wall was enough.

“That he really is a reincarnation of the mummy in the coffin there?” asked Davis, smiling. “No. Do you?”

“I don’t know,” said Creel, slowly. “I seem to be ready to believe almost anything—it must be in the air! But where did he get that story?”

"There is sometimes a curious clairvoyance about mania," Davis answered, more gravely, "and it may be that Jimmy has guessed the secret of this place. I had made some such guess myself—you'll remember—that the king had caused himself to be buried in this bare, unornamented tomb as a penance or expiation. I should have said that it was probably to expiate some impiety towards the gods; but it may be that the crime for which he wished to atone was the murder of a woman who loved him; yes—and it may be that we shall find her body behind that wall back yonder."

"Alive?" asked Creel, almost in a whisper.

"Rubbish!" said Davis, impatiently. "As dead as that papier-mâché fake you brought from New York!"

"I surely hope so!" said Creel, devoutly. "Go ahead."

"That's all, I think," said Davis, "except that there's just a possibility we may find the whole story on a papyrus roll inside the coffin. But if we do, and if the story should turn out to be as Jimmy has guessed it, that wouldn't prove anything—it certainly wouldn't prove that Jimmy Allen is the reincarnation of Sekenyen-Rē, and that Mlle. Roland is the reincarnation of the murdered favourite, and that this fantastic story you have made up for a moving-picture is true!"

"You're right, of course," agreed Creel, and made a motion as though he were brushing cobwebs from before his eyes. "Stated like that, it certainly *does* sound absurd. But for a moment . . ."

"If we steadily refuse to accept a supernatural explanation of anything," said Davis, "we can always find a natural one. Just give your reason

a chance!" And, torch in hand, he turned to an examination of the coffin.

It was, as I have said already, shaped roughly like the mummy inside it—though the feet which projected from the lower end were so enormous that, for Sekenyen's sake, I trust they were an exaggeration! At the top, the face of the dead king had been carved life-size in the solid wood, and then painted with a care and cunning which made its life-likeness, seen thus in the shadow, at least, simply startling. And this effect was enormously heightened by the wide-open, staring eyes—made, so Davis said, of mother-of-pearl, with pupils of jet. The way they shimmered in the light was positively uncanny.

The chest and shoulders were covered by a broad, jewelled necklace, quite wonderfully painted, and below it on the breast lay what looked like a snake and a vulture. A pair of closed wings, in full gilt, were folded about the body as though to protect it, and below the wings, down the sides of the coffin as far as I could see, ran an inscription which it was evident Davis was panting to translate.

"What do you make of it?" asked Creel, at last. "Is it really the fellow you thought it was?"

"It is Sekenyen-Rē beyond a doubt," answered Davis, quickly. "See—here is his cartouche—he is wearing the double crown of upper and lower Egypt—the uræus and the vulture are the sacred symbols of sovereignty over the two lands. These figures beneath his feet are his guardian gods—Amon-Rē, Ka and Osiris. I have never seen a more beautiful case. We must lift it out, so that I can get to work on that inscription."

"For heaven's sake, man," Creel protested,

"don't start anything like that to-night! You'll kill yourself! Besides, it's long past dinner-time."

I could tell by the way Davis looked at the coffin that he would willingly forego dinner and sleep and everything else for the opportunity to study it; but again reason triumphed over impulse.

"You're right," he said. "I'll get it over to the tent to-morrow. Then I can work at it in the evenings;" and, with the help of the natives, he slid the heavy covering-slab back into place, and nodded to them that they might go.

"I don't suppose it was really necessary to put that cover back," said Davis; "but I like to be on the safe side. It is just possible that one of the natives might be tempted to break into the coffin and steal whatever's inside it. He couldn't get away with it, of course, but he might do a lot of damage. Now it's safe," and with a last look around, he picked up his torch and led the way along the passage.

"You will have to tear this wall down before you can get that coffin out," said Creel, as we came to the narrow entrance.

"Yes; I'll set some men at it first thing in the morning," and Davis flashed his light over the wall and across the slabbed ceiling.

"Won't there be danger of the roof coming down?"

"I don't think so. The wall was put in the last thing, after the coffin had been sealed up in the sarcophagus, so the roof must have been built to stand without it. Of course the weight of the sand that is heaped up over it now may make a difference, but I'll take down just enough to let the coffin past."

"You'll not try to bring out the sarcophagus?"

"Oh, no; that's too big for me to handle—besides, it isn't of much value, since it isn't decorated. I'll turn it over to the government."

We found it quite dark when we emerged from the tomb; and we hurried up the steps and across to the tents, where we found Ma Creel anxiously awaiting us.

"I thought you were never coming!" she said. "I was just going to send after you."

"Nothing wrong, is there?" asked Creel. "How is the Princess? Did she wake up?"

"No," said Ma Creel; "she didn't wake up—she just turned over and went to sleep."

"But she was asleep."

"No, she wasn't—it wasn't sleep—and it wasn't a faint. I know—I've seen too many women in faints. It was something different—more serious. But she's sleeping now, like a log."

"What was it happened?" asked Davis, who had been listening closely. "You didn't tell me anything . . ."

"I didn't think of it," said Creel. "Mlle. Roland had some hard scenes, this afternoon, and played them magnificently, for all she was worth. We ended with the burying-alive scene—I told you yesterday, you know; and she played it so well that the natives got all worked up and broke loose and tore the wall down the minute the last stone was in place. You must have heard the racket."

"I did," nodded Davis; "I supposed that was what you were doing. I was too busy to look out. Well, what then?"

"When I got through the opening, I found Mlle. Roland in a heap on the floor. The strain had been too much for her."

"Ah!" commented Davis. "And Jimmy—did he faint, too?"

"Faint?" I burst in. "I should say not! He walked away the moment it was over, without waiting to see whether the girl was dead or alive."

"He had no reason to think her dead," Davis commented. "But he has evidently got past the fainting stage."

"Yes, he boasts of it!" I said. "He told me he would never be afraid again. But I didn't think him so cold-blooded . . ."

I broke off for want of the proper words to finish the sentence.

"Where is he now?" asked Davis.

"He's in his tent," said Ma Creel. "He came in about an hour ago, and went into the tent without saying a word, and I haven't seen him since. I suppose he's asleep . . ."

"Go and see, Billy," said Creel, and in a minute I was at Jimmy's bedside.

He had thrown himself on his cot without removing even his shoes, and lay on his back with his hands behind his head and his ankles crossed. His eyes were closed and he was breathing with a slow, deep regularity which told of profound slumber.

"He's sleeping like a log," I reported.

"And you say Mlle. Roland is sleeping, too?" asked Davis, who was scrabbling thoughtfully at his beard.

"She's sleeping as though she would never wake up," Ma Creel answered. "Great, deep breaths, as regular as clock-work."

"And she didn't come out of her faint? She didn't say anything?"

"Not a word; she didn't even open her eyes,

I was sitting right there bathing her forehead, when all at once she seemed to relax ; then she stretched out and crossed her ankles and put her hands behind her head, and went off to sleep—what in heaven's name is the matter now, Billy ? ”

“ Why,” I stuttered, “ why, that's just the way Jimmy is sleeping—ankles crossed, hands behind his head . . . ”

“ Well, what of it ? ” Creel broke in, with what seemed to me quite unnecessary violence. “ Didn't you ever hear of anybody sleeping like that before ! I'm tired of these hysterics ! Let's have dinner ; I'm nearly starved ! ” And he stalked away to the tent.

I remember thinking, as I looked after him, that he wasn't so very far from hysterics himself. Then I noticed that Davis was still scrabbling thoughtfully at his beard.

CHAPTER XXIV

NEITHER Jimmy nor Mlle. Roland was present at dinner that evening. They were sleeping peacefully on, and Davis, who had taken a look at both of them, advised against awakening them.

"I am something of a doctor, you know," he said, as we sat down to table; "got to be, out here in the desert—and my advice is to let them have their sleep out. They have been exhausted by the day's work—they need sleep more than food. They can eat when they wake up. Besides, to wake a person who is sleeping as soundly as they are is always a shock. And they've had shocks enough."

"Jimmy didn't have any shocks," objected Creel. "He just stood around sneering."

"We burn up more nerve force sometimes holding ourselves in than letting ourselves go," Davis pointed out. "From what you told me, I judge Mlle. Roland let herself go pretty completely."

"She just cut loose," said Creel. "It was gorgeous! She almost overpowered Digby and Mustafa, when they tried to chuck her into the tomb. Digby nearly had apoplexy—and I had to plaster Mustafa's arm with a ten-dollar bill, after it was all over."

"Yes, he was over here," said Ma Creel, "and I

dabbed some iodine on it and dressed it for him. I was just going to ask you what happened to him. He wouldn't tell me, but it looked like a bite—a deep bite right through his forearm."

"It *was* a bite!" I blurted out; and then I could have bitten my tongue, for Creel looked at me like a thunder-cloud.

"A bite!" echoed Ma Creel, and they all stared at me—except old Digby. He just hung his head and went on with his meal. "But I didn't know there were wild animals out here," and she cast a frightened glance into the darkness about us. "And nothing but a tent . . ."

"There aren't any wild animals!" said Creel, impatiently. "For goodness sake, don't start anything else, Mary!"

"Then what was it?" Ma Creel demanded. "It was deep, I tell you—savage—clear in! Billy . . ."

But I wouldn't have answered if I had been on the rack.

"Perhaps it was a camel," said Davis, quietly, at last. "Camels get vicious sometimes."

"No, it wasn't a camel," broke in Mollie, sharply. "It was too small for a camel."

"Then it must have been a goat," said Ma Creel, scornfully.

"It was the Princess bit him," explained Creel, unable to endure the ordeal any longer. "Just as he and Digby were thrusting her into the tomb, she lost control, somehow—flew off—forgot it was only make-believe, and defended herself in the only way that remained to her. And then Mustafa lost control, too, and picked her up and jammed her through the hole as though she were a bundle of rags. It's lucky she wasn't hurt! And then the

natives lost control, and went whooping over us and tore down the wall! By George, it was a strenuous afternoon—eh, Digby?”

We all started to laugh at old Digby—it seemed to ease our nerves—and then, when he looked up, I saw two ugly red streaks across his left cheek-bone.

“What’s the matter with *you*?” asked Creel. “Did she get you, too?”

“She tried to claw my eyes out,” answered Digby, intensely.

“Nonsense!” said Creel, impatiently.

“Of course, I may be mistaken,” said Digby; “but I would much sooner handle a wild-cat!”

We all laughed again, but there was a sort of painful undercurrent in the laughter. A girl who bit men savagely in the arm and tried to claw their eyes out wasn’t exactly pleasant to think about.

“I’m glad you didn’t lose an eye,” said Creel finally; “but it will make a great scene. I am sorry you didn’t see it, Professor.”

“So am I,” agreed Davis. “Will you have some more to-morrow?”

“Yes—but nothing so exciting. I am going to rush this thing through as fast as I can, before something serious happens to my principals.”

“Don’t push them too hard,” advised Davis. “They both seem to be very highly-strung and extraordinarily susceptible to suggestion. They lose control, as you call it; and every time they do that makes it easier to do it again—it becomes a sort of habit.”

“Doctor Jekyll and Mr. Hyde,” I ventured.

“Exactly,” Davis assented. “You’ll remember that after a time, Jekyll kept slipping into Hyde in spite of himself. These two haven’t got that far

yet—they will probably wake up all right in the morning ; but they are evidently set on hair-triggers, as it were. A touch sets them off. So you will have to nurse them along.”

“ I’m going to,” said Creel ; “ but I’ve got to complete the picture—don’t forget that.”

“ Will you need the natives to-morrow ? ” Davis asked.

“ Yes. We’ll do the slave-market,” he added, turning to me ; “ and then we’ll show the girl being captured by the slavers and brought across the desert. I want to get as much of that caravan stuff as possible—that’s what we came to Egypt for. Then we’ll take a few love scenes in the tent and beneath the palms. We’ll get as many feet as we can ! ”

“ I hope you can spare me five or six of the natives,” said Davis. “ I would like to get the case over to the tent, where I can keep my eye on it.”

“ Of course,” agreed Creel, instantly. “ Take as many as you need. Only I’ll have to have Mustafa to keep those fellows in order and tell them what to do.”

“ Oh, I don’t need Mustafa,” said Davis, and so it was settled.

Davis hurried away after dinner to write up his notes, and Creel sat down to moil over his scenario with a disturb-me-if-you-dare look which there was no mistaking. Drawn by an irresistible fascination, I went in and took another look at Jimmy. He was lying exactly as before, breathing long and deep. There was something abnormal about it : I had seen him asleep many times, and he had never breathed like that—nor lay on his back with his hands behind his head and his ankles crossed. It was a strained, unnatural attitude . . .

As I tore myself away and came out of the tent, I found Mollie waiting for me—at least, I should have supposed she was waiting, if she hadn't seemed so surprised when she saw me.

"I thought you were off by yourself somewhere smoking your pipe," she said.

"I've been taking a look at Jimmy," I explained. "He is still asleep."

"So is that—that vampire!" she whispered. And then, after a moment: "Would you like to see her?"

"Do you think it would be all right?"

"Of course it would be all right. Uncle Warrie and Mr. Davis have both seen her. I *want* you to see her. Come along," and she caught my hand and ran, rather than walked, to the women's tent.

A night-lamp was burning just inside the entrance, and she caught this up, and swept aside a canvas flap, and motioned me through.

But I held back.

"You go first," I said. "See if everything's all right."

"Of course everything's all right. Can't you hear her?"

Yes, I could hear her—that deep, regular breathing might have been an echo of Jimmy's. I slipped through, and Mollie let the flap fall behind us. Then she drew me to the bed, and held the light so that the sleeper's face was clearly revealed.

She was lying on her back, her hands clasped behind her head, her ankles crossed—and I noted, with a curious little thrill, that her left ankle was over her right, just as Jimmy's was. Her eyes were closed, and her long, curved lashes swept the lower

lids. Her breast rose and fell convulsively with those long, deep, regular breaths. But for them, she might have been dead, so motionless she was and pale, save for that livid mark across her cheek. Mollie indicated it with an inquiring finger.

"Did she really fall?" she whispered.

"Yes," I said; "but that wasn't what made the bruise. Mustafa struck her."

I saw the lamp quiver in Mollie's hand.

"How horrible!" she whispered. "How horrible! But she bit him—you should have seen that bite—deep, like a wild beast's . . ."

"Come along," I urged. "We mustn't wake her," and I pulled her toward the door, took the lamp from her hand, and set it down on the little table outside. "Now come and sit beside me while I smoke that pipe," I added. "I want to talk to you."

She made no objection, and together we walked out to the edge of the palms, where we could look off across the desert, and sat down side by side.

"There wasn't any danger of waking her," said Mollie, suddenly, as I was filling my pipe. "I made a lot of noise a while ago, just to see, and she never stirred. I don't believe she is asleep at all."

"Not asleep?"

"No; she doesn't breathe like that when she's asleep—nobody does. She's in a trance."

"Then Jimmy is, too—he is breathing just the same way."

"I know—I went in to see him."

"You did?"

"Yes—I want this thing settled—I can't stand it any longer."

"I thought for a while," I said slowly, "that perhaps Mlle. Roland was a dope fiend, and that that was the cause of her spells of listlessness and languor. Perhaps she is drugged now—perhaps those wild actions of hers this afternoon were the result of a drug; and now she is sleeping off the effects."

"But how about Jimmy?" Mollie objected. "He isn't a dope fiend—we know that—and his condition is exactly the same."

"Well, what is it, then?" I demanded.

For a moment Mollie was silent, staring out across the sand, then she turned to me impulsively.

"Do you know what I think, Billy," she said. "I think their spirits are off somewhere together—over at the tomb, perhaps . . ."

Her voice trailed off as though she were afraid to finish, and we sat in silence, looking out toward the ruins, behind which the moon was rising. How beautiful the desert was—and yet how dismal—how threatening! Perhaps Mollie was right—why shouldn't she be right? I could imagine them walking side by side through some dream-world . . .

"Mollie," I said, in a low tone, "the most astonishing thing happened over there this afternoon. Davis, you know, took the lid off that stone coffin, and inside of it was a wooden mummy-case, with a face painted at one end of it; and when that lid was raised, and we looked in, I would have sworn for a minute that it was Jimmy Allen staring up at us. It was just for a flash—and then the face changed, and the likeness was gone. And then Jimmy came in and looked at it, and told us in the most matter-of-fact way, that it really was he, and that the woman he had murdered was walled up at the far end of

the tomb; and that she had never died, but had just waited and waited, for four thousand years. . . . It sounds ridiculous, I know; but when Jimmy was telling it, the cold chills kept running up my spine and over my scalp, and I would have sworn it was all true, and that when Davis opens that wall . . .”

“He mustn’t open it!” breathed Mollie. “You mustn’t let him open it!”

“Creel tried to talk him out of it, but he just laughed at him—called it superstition, ignorant fear. He half-believes in it himself, I think, but he won’t let himself be frightened. He has nerve—I’ll say that for him—and he has a theory that every time we yield to unreasoning fear, we are setting the race back toward savagery.”

“He’s welcome to his theories,” said Mollie; “but he mustn’t be allowed to open that wall!”

“How can we prevent it? After all, when one thinks of it, it *does* seem foolish . . .”

“If he opens that wall,” gasped Mollie, her hand clutching my arm, “something awful will happen—something *awful*—I feel it!”

I caught the hand and held it—and she didn’t draw it away. After all, I reflected, I could stand a ghost or two—I could even welcome them!—if they drove Mollie into my arms!

“Davis just laughs at it,” I said comfortingly; “and he’s probably right. He says Jimmy has moiled around over this picture so long, that it has become a sort of mania—he had a kind of heat-stroke, you know, a few days ago, and that may have helped. In fact, Jimmy sat right here beside me last night and told me he was getting things all mixed up—that he couldn’t tell what was real from what was

only imaginary; his outside and inside worlds had run together, as it were . . .”

“You don’t mean that he’s gone mad?” asked Mollie, horror-stricken. “If he has, it’s that woman . . .”

“He hasn’t gone mad,” I broke in, impatiently; “he’ll come around all right as soon as he gets this infernal picture out of his head. I feel sometimes that I’m going mad myself. Let’s stop talking about it—let’s talk about ourselves. Mollie . . .”

“It isn’t the picture,” Mollie broke in. “It is something in the air—a kind of threat! I feel it all the time. I have been in wilder pictures than this, lots of times, but nobody ever went crazy before—and bit people—and tore their eyes out—not even the director!”

“Well,” I said, “I think Creel has about got to the limit of *his* nerve. He’ll give the order to pack up as soon as he can. He is over there now, slashing his scenario to pieces and simplifying it every way he can. But that hasn’t anything to do with us. Now, look here, Mollie . . .”

“Billy,” she broke in fiercely, “I can’t stand it! If you grow sentimental now—if you *dare* to grow sentimental now!—I shall hate you!”

“I wasn’t growing sentimental,” I said resentfully.

“You sounded like it!”

“I was just going to say . . .”

“I don’t want to hear it! I’m ready to fly to pieces as it is!”

“I don’t see what there is for *us* to worry about,” I said. “If Jimmy and Mlle. Roland want to go wandering off through dreamland together, why

need we care? And if Jimmy thinks he was once a king of Egypt, I don't see that it's anything to us! And if Davis does dig out a woman who has been buried four thousand years, and who has been waiting all that time for vengeance—why, it isn't us she's after! We've got ourselves to think about, Mollie, and I have been doing some mighty serious thinking on that subject recently, as I told you the other night. And you promised . . .”

“I promised nothing!” she broke in. “Let go my hand!”

“You led me to infer . . .”

“No, I didn't! How can I help what you infer! Billy, I won't be kissed! I hate it! I . . .”

And then suddenly her voice stopped in her throat with a sort of gurgle, the hands which had been holding me away fell limp, a slow shudder ran through her, and I saw her eyes fix themselves in a stare of horror over my shoulder, out across the sand . . .

It was a moment before I dared turn my head . . .

For an instant, I saw nothing; then, far out, a dim shape moved . . . came nearer . . .

It might have been the shadow of a cloud—but there was no cloud in the sky. It might have been a whorl of sand caught up by the wind—but there was no wind, or at most a gentle breeze. It came nearer, with a strange, gliding motion, as though swept along on wings; and then my heart gave a sickening thud, for it was the same grey shape I had seen once before—in the tomb! And as I stared, it resolved itself into two shapes, moving side by side—as though hand in hand! In another moment, they reached the first group of palms and disappeared.

I knew what was in my own mind—I knew the same thought was in Mollie's. I dared not look at her; I dared not let her see my eyes; I just sat there, still holding her hand, staring at the spot where I had seen them last!

It was Mollie who stirred first.

"We must be going back," she said, and rose wearily to her feet and brushed the sand from her dress.

I didn't want to go back; I was afraid to go back; suppose that trance was ended . . .

Nevertheless, I rose and followed her. There was nothing else to do.

From a little distance, we caught the sound of voices, and saw a dim group sitting around the table. Evidently they had seen nothing—but the shadows would be invisible beneath the trees . . .

I felt Mollie shiver—I shivered myself, as I strained my eyes to see who was in that group; and then I breathed a sigh of relief. There were only Ma Creel and Digby and Creel himself. Perhaps, after all there *had* been a cloud . . .

Creel saw us first.

"Hurry up!" he called. "We've got some lemonade!"

"Who said lemonade?" asked a voice behind him, and I saw the tent-flap raised, and Jimmy stepped out into the dim light. "Gracious, but I had a sleep!" he added, stretching luxuriously. "What time is it, anyway?"

"It is nearly eleven," said Creel.

"What!"

"Yes—you seemed so tired, we just let you sleep. How do you feel?"

"Like a new man!" said Jimmy.

My eyes had been on the other tent-flap, from the first moment. I knew it would be raised—I knew it!

“And I also!” cried Mlle. Roland, as she came toward us. “Or, at least, like a new woman! I feel as though I had slept a year!”

Jimmy was regarding her with a strange smile, but she walked straight past him, apparently without seeing him, and sat down beside Creel at the table.

“But I am thirsty!” she said, and held out her glass.

CHAPTER XXV

CREEL had us at work at dawn next morning, and we kept hard at it all day, save for the noon siesta ; but there were no such sensational incidents as there had been the day before. Jimmy and the Princess were both effective, but there was no merging of the imaginary in the real—no loss of control. It was just good acting.

And both of them seemed to be their natural selves. The girl had apparently forgotten all that had happened the day before—though she had still that bruise on her cheek—I could see how carefully she had painted it out—and must have wondered how it came there!—and chatted with all of us impartially and more brightly than had been her habit since the journey into the desert started ; while if Jimmy still believed himself to be the reincarnation of Sekenyen-Rē, he certainly gave no sign of it. And we all breathed more freely, and did our best to wipe certain disquieting incidents from our memories, and were even a little hilarious in our reaction from the nervous tension of the previous night. In a word, we were just the average motion-picture company, doing our work as well as we could, and having the best possible time on the side !

During an interval when Creel was getting a scene ready, I walked over to Mollie.

"Things look different by daylight," I remarked ; "excursions through dreamland, and such like !"

She looked up at me scornfully.

"You've got a mighty short memory, Billy Williams !" she said.

"I can't make up my mind how much of it is memory and how much imagination !" I retorted. "The more I think of it, the more I am convinced that it was all imagination. We didn't really see anything . . ."

"*Didn't* we !" she sniffed.

"Or if we did, it was only a drifting shadow. We were all worked up, you know."

"You may have been—I wasn't."

"Mollie," I said, "you don't really believe . . ."

I didn't finish the sentence—it seemed too absurd to express in words. But she understood.

"Yes, I do !" she retorted. "I believe just that !"

"Well," I said, "whatever it was, it came at a most unpropitious moment. May I see you again to-night, Mollie ?"

"No," she said ; "I've had enough of ghost-hunting."

"I wasn't thinking about ghost-hunting," I began ; but just then Creel shouted that he was ready, and I had to leave it at that.

We did the slave-market, and the way Mlle. Roland blazed back contempt and defiance when the king strolled past and looked at her appraisingly was beautiful to see. (Creel had found it impossible to work out Jimmy's idea with the means at his disposal, and had reverted to his own.) She

was also superb when the eunuchs dragged her into the king's presence, and he looked her over brutally, and waved her away to the harem. The scenes that followed, where her hate changed gradually to a consuming passion, were also consummately done.

"Of course," said Creel, as these progressed, "we ought to have a palace to do these in, but I'm afraid to wait till we get home. So we will do the best we can out here—and then, if we *do* get home, we'll make re-takes of some of them."

"Why shouldn't we get home?" I asked, but he only shook his head.

He did wonderfully well, I thought. He had the tent, of course; and one beautiful spot near the pool served as a corner of the palace gardens; and another spot with a lovely clump of palms in the background served as another corner. Always the white-clad eunuchs were on guard; and Ma Creel and Mollie were in attendance—Mollie, the former favourite whom the new one had supplanted, and who was plotting revenge with the prime minister—Digby. We did the slavers' attack—using the native camp, this time; and then we did some caravan stuff—the slavers making off across the desert with their booty—and by that time there wasn't light for anything more, even had we been able to attempt it. We were all dead tired, but Creel was triumphant.

"Another day like this," he said to me, as we were washing up, "and I don't care what happens!"

"It doesn't look as if anything were going to happen," I pointed out. "Everything is normal again."

"Too damned normal!" Creel growled. "To-day's scenes didn't have the snap that yesterday's had."

"No," I agreed; "nobody spat in anybody's face; nobody bit anybody, nor tried to scratch anybody's eyes out!"

"Maybe we'll have better luck to-morrow," said Creel, hopefully.

"Better luck?" I stared.

"It is that sort of stuff which makes a picture, Billy," said Creel; "you know that as well as I do. I'd have no objection to getting bit or scratched, if it helped make a good picture. I'd welcome it! Any good actor would! I wish I had more actresses who bit and scratched and raised Cain generally when the action called for it! Hello! What's this?"

There was the tramp of feet outside, and then the curtain-flap was thrust back, and Davis appeared—very dirty and evidently very tired, but with shining eyes; and close behind him toiled six natives, carrying the gilded coffin of Sekenyen-Rē, while two others brought up the rear lugging the wooden chest.

"Good Lord!" protested Creel. "You're not going to bring those things in here!"

"I am, though," said Davis, cheerfully. "I want them where I can keep my eye on them—the coffin especially. It's too precious to take any chances with!"

"But there's scarcely room to turn around, as it is."

"I'm going to put it on my cot," said Davis. "It won't be in the way there—at least, not in anybody's way but mine—and I can sleep on the ground beside it. There's room in that corner for the chest."

Devotion to duty always silenced Creel, and he stood aside now without another word while the

natives squeezed past and deposited the mummy-case on the professor's cot, and the canopic chest in the corner he had indicated.

"That's all," he said, and waved them away, and then he got out his electric torch and began to examine the hieroglyphics with which the sides of the coffin were covered, quite forgetful of the fact that he was streaked with dirt and that dinner was waiting. He was fairly smacking his lips with joy. Creel's face softened as he looked at him—he understood the artist's enthusiasm.

"Come and get washed up," he said. "Those pot-hooks can wait. Dinner is ready—and you look fagged out."

"I am," Davis admitted, and snapped off his torch. "Getting that wall down was a harder job than I expected. It was like adamant—talk about Roman work—it isn't in the same class with the early Egyptian! And the tomb was like an oven!"

"Let me have your torch," said Creel; and while Davis washed his hands and face and brushed the dust out of his hair, we took another look at the coffin. For the first time we appreciated its full beauty. "The face isn't in the least like Jimmy's," said Creel, as the light came to rest on the staring eyes. "I wonder how it ever affected us like that?"

I was squinting down at it, and I wasn't so sure.

"Perhaps it was the way we were looking at it," I suggested. "Even now, it looks somehow as though it *might* change to Jimmy's at any instant."

Creel was squinting too, with his eyes curiously puckered; and after a moment, he nodded without speaking. Then he ran the light around the edge of the lid.

"Have you opened it?" he asked Davis.

"I lifted the lid and looked in, to be sure everything was all right."

"And was it?"

"Oh, yes—the mummy is there, beautifully wrapped. I'll not try to unwrap it till I get it home to the museum—it's too delicate a job."

"Then you're done out here?"

"There is still the rear wall of the tomb to open. I'll do that to-morrow."

"Oh," said Creel, slowly, "so you have quite made up your mind to open that wall, too!"

"Certainly—I thought that was understood. I was wondering if I might have Mustafa."

"What do you want with Mustafa?"

"Fact is," said Davis, "if I can't get Mustafa to help, I will have to do the job myself. I tried to set the natives at it this afternoon, and they refused. Refused point-blank. I couldn't budge them."

"What was the matter?"

"Some ignorant superstition. Perhaps they know the meaning of that sign—it is wonderful how those old superstitions persist sometimes! Anyway, I couldn't get them near that wall."

"But Mustafa is a native," Creel objected.

"He's a Copt—it isn't exactly the same thing. He doesn't believe in signs—at least not in old heathen ones. I think he reasons that a heathen sign couldn't have any potency against a Christian. Anyway, he is willing to take the risk."

"For a consideration, I suppose?"

"Exactly. May I have him?"

"I'll see," said Creel, somewhat grudgingly, and handed back the torch. "You can have him part of the day, I guess."

"Thanks. It won't be any great job to make a

hole in that wall big enough to squeeze through. That's all I want."

"I don't suppose there is any use trying to dissuade you?"

"Not a bit," said Davis, briskly. "It's all in the day's work, you know. I wouldn't be playing the game if I didn't open it."

"I understand," Creel nodded. "But there is one thing—I wish you wouldn't say anything about it. My people have quieted down; I have a feeling that if they knew about this, it would upset them."

"All right," Davis agreed; and with that we went out and joined the others at the table.

"What were you men gassing about so long in there?" Ma Creel demanded.

"Davis has brought over his great find," Creel explained; "the coffin of Sekenyen-Rē, erstwhile King of Upper and Lower Egypt—with the gentleman inside—at least, part of him! There is also a small box which, I understand, contains his innards."

"But look here," objected Ma Creel, "I don't fancy sleeping so near the thing. I abhor corpses."

"My dear madam," said Davis, "this corpse has been dead four thousand years, and I don't see how it could possibly harm anyone!"

"I don't see what that has to do with it," retorted Ma Creel. "It isn't any deader after four thousand years than it was the first day!"

"But this is quite a consecrated mummy, Mary," said Creel. "It is going to prove that the Bible is true!"

Ma Creel sniffed.

"As if I needed a mummy to prove that! I don't think you ought to joke about such things, Warrie."

"I wasn't joking," Creel protested. "I was merely repeating what the professor told me."

"It is true, madam," said Davis. "I hope to find, in the hieroglyphs on that coffin—perhaps also in papyrus documents inside the wrappings—proof of the sojourn of the Children of Israel in the land of Egypt."

We were all silent for a while, after that. I suppose we were all a little awed. I know I was—the thought was rather overpowering. I glanced at Jimmy and Mlle. Roland, where they sat opposite each other at the far end of the table, to see how they took it; but they seemed quite unaffected. They had taken no part in the conversation; they had gone on with the meal as though they had not heard it. Now, as I looked at them, they gave me the vivid impression of talking together. They did not so much as glance at each other, but somehow I was sure they were in communication—close, confidential communication—as though their spirits were talking, without need of words . . .

And I saw again those two shadowy shapes crossing the desert, hand in hand . . .

"Wake up, Billy!" said Creel's voice, and he gave me a startling slap on the shoulder. "Come along!"

"Along where?" I asked, and looked around to find that the others were already on their feet.

"Davis is going to show the ladies his great find. Are you coming, Jimmy?"

Jimmy looked across at Mlle. Roland, a little smile twitching the corners of his lips.

"Shall we go?" he asked; and there was an undercurrent of challenge in the words.

"I certainly intend to go," she answered, rising.

Somehow I found Mollie's hand snuggled close in mine.

"I'm frightened!" she breathed, as she pressed against me.

"Then don't go," I said.

"Yes, yes; I want to see it—I want to see . . ."

She stopped and drew away. But I knew what she meant; she wanted to see if that painted face really looked like Jimmy Allen.

Creel had taken the lamp from the table; Davis had produced his flashlight; the rest of us crowded into the tent after them.

I should explain, perhaps, that our tent was not divided by canvas curtains as the women's was. It was quite open, with our five cots set side by side, with just room for a small folding-chair and a bag for our personal belongings in between. Davis's was nearest the entrance, and then came Jimmy's, and then mine, and then Creel's, and then Digby's. It was on Davis's cot the coffin had been placed, and we were right on it as soon as we were inside the tent.

"Oh, oh!" cried Ma Creel. "It is gorgeous!"

And then we stood looking down at it while Davis pointed out the royal cartouche, and explained the meaning of some of the symbols with which it was covered. Mollie had pressed up closer, still holding my hand, and stood staring down at the painted face.

"Well?" I whispered.

She shook her head slightly, and I saw her screwing up her eyes; and then she gave a sudden gasp of horror—and I knew that the face had changed . . .

"Come away!" I whispered; but again she shook her head, and stood as though fascinated . . .

I looked around at the others—Davis, intent and eager; Creel deeply interested, evolving another feature, perhaps; Digby and Ma Creel with furrowed brows, trying to understand; Jimmy listening with that little ironic smile, as though he knew far more about it than Davis, but found it not worth while to say so or to correct his mistakes; Mlle. Roland, close beside him, clutching his arm with a revealing intimacy; her face very white, her lips working . . .

Jimmy turned and looked down at her.

"Don't you think it a good likeness?" he whispered.

I saw her close her eyes and sway forward . . .

"Look out!" I cried.

And the next instant, before I could so much as move, she crashed heavily forward across the coffin.

CHAPTER XXVI

I KNEW that Jimmy Allen had whispered those words to test her; I knew that he felt her going, and that he could have caught her if he wished; but he never so much as moved a finger, and for a long breath, he stood quite still, looking down at her. Then he bent and caught her up with a sudden fierceness, and turned and faced us, and I saw that his face was aglow with triumph.

It was as though he had won a great victory after desperate struggle; and he stood a moment so, holding her close against him with a sort of ownership, and looking around at us defiantly.

It was Ma Creel who got her wits back first.

"Take her over to our tent, Jimmy," she said, authoritatively. "We'll undress her and get her to bed. The poor thing has been worked to death." And she shot her husband an accusing glance. "Come along, Mollie—I'll need your help."

I half expected Jimmy to disregard the order, and walk away into the desert with the girl in his arms. But he didn't. Ma Creel was too matter-of-fact, perhaps, to permit of any heroics. At any rate, after the merest instant's hesitation, he walked quietly out of the tent, the two women after him.

Creel drew a deep breath.

"Well!" he began, and ran tremulous fingers through his hair. "We've got to go through all that again, it seems! Do you really think it is overwork?" he asked, turning to Davis.

"No," said the latter, "I don't. It's an overwrought emotional state. These fainting spells are clearly cataleptic. Perhaps she has had them all her life. Now she'll probably go off into a trance-like sleep again."

"It's something between her and Jimmy," I put in. "Didn't you see how she clung to him? Didn't you see him whisper to her? Didn't you see his eyes just now?"

Creel nodded.

"He's in love with her, of course," he said; "has been since the moment he laid eyes on her; and she . . ."

"Do you remember how she looked the first time she saw him?" I burst out. "You didn't get the effect of it as I did—I never saw such loathing in a human countenance!"

"She said she couldn't go on," Creel explained to Davis; "sprang to her feet and tried to get off the boat. But it was too late—the engines started just then—and she quieted down. In fact, she sort of apologized afterwards—said it was nerves, or something like that. But I have felt ever since that, away down in her heart, she hated the sight of him."

"Yet she clung to him to-night," I said, feebly.

Davis was scrabbling thoughtfully at his beard.

"Then that is what the fight has been," he said.

"And you think he has won?" asked Creel.

"He thinks so, anyway," said Davis. "But I'm not so sure."

"By George, you're right!" Creel agreed. "That girl has got the devil in her if any woman ever had! She'll strangle him in his sleep some night!"

"Yes," assented Davis, slowly, "I feel the same way . . ."

And then he stopped suddenly, for the tent-flap was raised and Jimmy came in. If he had heard that last sentence, he gave no sign.

"She's all right," he said, in answer to our look. "Sleeping like a baby. I feel dog-tired myself. I'll turn in, if you don't mind."

"I thought I would study these hieroglyphics a while," said Davis, hesitatingly; "but if it will disturb you . . ."

"Dynamite wouldn't disturb me," Jimmy assured him; and he sat down on his cot and began to unlace his shoes.

Creel said something about having some work to do on the script, and gathered up his manuscript and took it over to the property-tent, where there was a table and a lamp. I sat down outside the tent, and got out my pipe and lighted it, in the hope that Mollie would smell it and come out; but she didn't; and at last, realizing how tired I was, I resolved to go to bed.

I found Davis, with his torch propped on a chair, bending over the coffin, intent on his study of the hieroglyphics; he greeted me with a nod so curt that it was the plainest sort of invitation to pass on. In the next cot Jimmy slumbered peacefully—on his side, I was glad to note—his back turned to the old Egyptologist. I passed on to the third cot, got out of my clothes, into my pyjamas, and stretched myself out luxuriously.

It had seemed quite dark inside the tent as I came

in from the bright moonlight, save for the reflected glow of Davis's torch ; but as I lay staring up into the night, I gradually perceived that it was not really dark—that the wonderful night outside penetrated the canvas with a luminous glow . . .

How long I slept, I don't know ; but I awoke suddenly with a start, and lay listening, with a strange sense of apprehension. I could hear some one breathing regularly at my left, and so knew that Creel had come to bed without disturbing me. But from the other side I could detect no sound—and yet I remembered distinctly that when I first lay down I could hear Jimmy's breathing quite clearly. I peered cautiously in his direction ; but the light was so dim, I could not be certain whether he was there or not. I might have stretched out my hand and made sure, but I dared not. Something held me back. I was afraid of what my fingers might encounter !

Beyond Jimmy's bed, I could see the coffin rearing its great shape against the square of moonlight which marked the open tent-flap—there was something sinister in the way its shadow fell across Jimmy's cot. Where was Davis sleeping, I wondered ? Had he really rolled himself in his blankets on the ground, in order to guard his treasure ? But what was it he feared ? What could happen to it ?

As I lay there staring at it, trying to muster courage to stretch out my hand into its shadow, it seemed to me that its painted sides began to give out little flashes of light, and a sort of phosphorescent glow gathered above its gilded top, and hung there, gently waxing and waning. Perhaps there was a phosphorescent quality in the gilt—I had heard of such things ; or perhaps . . . I shivered slightly. Where

was it I had read that all decaying things possessed a certain phosphorescence ?

I turned over impatiently and closed my eyes and resolved to go to sleep. Such imaginings were morbid—it was folly to give way to them. It made no difference to me whether Jimmy was there or not. Suppose he was not there—it was natural enough that he should have gone outside to smoke a cigarette, or get a breath of fresh air—yes, or keep an engagement for a meeting ! Whatever the source of the phosphorescence, it was essentially the same thing, and absolutely harmless.

But there, in the silence of the night, all my senses seemed preternaturally quickened ; an odour of musk and spices drifted across my nostrils ; in the stillness behind me, I fancied I could detect a stealthy movement—a soft rustle, as of a woman's gown . . .

My eyes had snapped wide open again ; and I lay there listening, listening ; and a little stream of perspiration ran down across my temple and dropped off upon the pillow ; my heart was hammering in my throat—I could stand it no longer—I turned and looked . . .

For a moment I saw only what I had seen before—the square coffin against the light of the entrance ; the faint glow above it ; the prickle of light along its side—and then my heart gave a sudden leap—for there *was* something else . . .

Above the coffin a grey cloud hovered—a translucent cloud, for it only dimmed the light behind it ; a cloud whose edges I could not distinguish, but which nevertheless reminded me of a human form ; a cloud which wavered uncertainly this way and that . . .

And then, against the light, I distinctly saw the occupant of the coffin *sit up*—I saw his head and shoulders coming, apparently, right through the lid; a strange white shape, but indubitably a man; and I saw him hold out his hand to the floating cloud, as though in welcome, and rise; and together they glided from the tent . . .

And then Creel and Davis were standing over me, the latter playing his torch into my blinded eyes.

"Take it away!" I gasped, and pushed the torch aside and sat up; and then from the farther cot I got a glimpse of Digby's frightened face.

"What in heaven's name is the matter?" Creel demanded. "I thought you were being murdered!"

"The mummy!" I gasped. "It—it got away—it walked right out of the tent . . ."

I saw the panic in Davis's face as he stepped quickly to the coffin and ran his ray of light over it.

"Nonsense!" he said. "It hasn't been touched."

"You were dreaming!" snapped Creel. "Go to sleep again!" and he turned away to his cot.

"I *wasn't* dreaming!" I protested hotly. "I was as wide awake as I am this minute. I saw the mummy sit up through the lid, and hold out its hand to the cloud, and they glided away together . . ."

"Look here, Billy," broke in Creel savagely, coming back and standing over me, "don't you go crazy, too! Two maniacs are all I can stand . . ."

"I'm not crazy! I saw it, I tell you . . . and there was an odour of musk and spices . . . and the rustle of a woman's dress . . ."

"There is a faint odour of spices about the coffin," broke in Davis; "there always is; and as for the rustle of a dress—well, the breeze in the palms outside would explain that."

"But it won't explain what I *saw*!" I said. "Besides, where's Jimmy?"

For the light from Davis's torch had swept across Jimmy's bed, and we had all seen that it was empty.

"I don't care where he is!" said Creel, still more savagely. "What you saw, if you saw anything, was that madman getting out of bed. Your heated imagination did the rest."

I couldn't deny that it *might* have been that; I *might* have got my perspective wrong in the darkness—but I didn't believe it. And then there was the cloud. I saw Creel's gesture of exasperation when I mentioned the cloud.

"Anyhow, I think we ought to find Jimmy," I said at last, realizing the uselessness of argument. "You said yourself, professor . . ."

Davis clicked his tongue impatiently.

"I know I did—even I get infected with this foolishness sometimes—it's in the air! Well, I'm willing to take a look for him—I see there is no chance for sleep until we do!"

I fumbled around and found my shoes and slipped them on.

"I'm going too," I said; and then, when we got outside, I was surprised to find Creel at my elbow.

"Three fools are no worse than two!" he muttered, but he didn't meet my eyes. "We'll find that idiot sitting under a palm smoking a cigarette. And he'll laugh at us! What the devil is that?" he added, for from the direction of the native camp the night wind bore to our ears a sound as of a low crooning.

It was little more than a murmur; but it rose and fell on a gamut of only three or four notes in a manner

inexpressibly weird. For an instant Davis was as startled as Creel and I ; then I saw him smile.

"The natives have got a chanter at work to keep off the evil spirits," he said. "They have been uneasy since they learned I was going to open that inner tomb."

Creel muttered something to the effect that they couldn't be any more uneasy than he was, but Davis only shrugged, and we walked on across the oasis. We saw no sign of Jimmy, and at last we came to the little slope, right at the edge of the desert, on the other side of which the natives had pitched their camp. From the midst of it, clear and piercing in spite of its subdued tone, came the chant.

And then, as we topped the rise and looked down upon the camp, we saw the chanter, squatted on his haunches, and around him the sleeping fellahin.

"Let's have a word with the fellow," said Davis. "He may have seen our man."

We threaded our way between the natives, huddled in their cloaks and sleeping soundly, evidently with complete faith in the efficacy of the chant to ward off all things evil ; and then we came to the chanter where he sat, with head thrown back and eyes fixed on the heavens . . .

He turned his head with a jerk when he heard us coming, and the chant ceased abruptly ; then, when he recognized us, he sprang to his feet, and replied in a bated voice to Davis's brief questions. The latter motioned us away at last, and we followed him out from the circle of sleepers. Before we had taken the second step, the chant began again.

Davis led us right to the edge of the oasis. Then he stopped and looked out across the sands.

"He says there are ghosts abroad to-night," he

said. "He says they are dancing about the tombs. He says he saw them quite clearly when the moon rose; and that two from the oasis joined them . . ."

He stopped and we all stood staring out at the group of mounds which marked the ruins. In my own mind, I had not the slightest doubt that Jimmy was over there—and that he was not alone.

"Shall we go and see?" asked Davis abruptly, and peered into our faces.

I shrank back. I didn't want to go. I regretted that I had insisted upon this wild adventure. I didn't want to see—I was afraid to see . . .

But Creel was made of sterner stuff.

"Come on," he said, between clenched teeth. "If we are ever going to get to the bottom of this mystery, now is the time!"

And he started resolutely out across the sand.

CHAPTER XXVII

IF the natives had seen us, they would have been more certain than ever that there were ghosts abroad, for, from a distance, we must have had a sufficiently weird look as we set out across the sand. Close up, we were ridiculous rather than weird, with nothing on but shoes and pyjamas; and, as we looked at each other, the tension with which we had started out from the shadow of the trees suddenly relaxed.

"The ghosts will run at the first glimpse of us," laughed Creel. "They will be scared to death. They'll be out-ghosted! That wouldn't be so bad for a comedy reel, Billy—the ghosts scared out of their wits by the people they are trying to frighten!"

Davis laughed grimly; and we plodded on in silence. I suppose Creel was turning the idea over in his mind, for he chuckled softly once or twice. And then we were at the edge of the ruins, and clambered up the first of the mounds which topped the excavation.

I don't know what I expected to see there—a *danse macabre*, or some such horror, perhaps—and I strained my eyes from end to end of it at a single glance; but it lay white and empty in the moonlight.

"No ghosts there," said Creel. "Suppose we take a look in the tomb." And he started down the stair.

The black entrance to the tomb seemed to me unspeakably sinister and threatening, but Davis switched on his torch, and he and Creel stepped through without hesitation. I followed, wondering if they were really as fearless as they seemed, or if their knees were secretly knocking together as mine were.

Davis cast the beam of light about the outer chamber, and I saw that it was piled with the debris of the wall which had masked the entrance to the corridor.

"I had to take down nearly all of it before I could get the coffin out," he said; "it was a hard job."

"How about the roof?" Creel asked.

"I think it will hold," said Davis, and threw the light up over it. "Hello! There's an ugly crack!"

It *was* an ugly one, running from side to side across the chamber.

"I'd hate to be in here when that came down," said Creel; "or in the inner tomb. It would mean burial alive for certain!"

Davis was examining the crack attentively.

"The wall was built to brace the roof more than I thought it would be," he said. "The Egyptians must have foreseen the possibility of great masses of sand being heaped above it, and provided in this way for the extra weight. But I don't think it will come down—not for a while, anyway. Of course I could build the wall up again—but that would be an awful bother. Still, it might be worth while, if only to preserve the place."

"If you are going to work in here at all," said

Creel, "you ought certainly to do it—unless you're tired of living! I'm not sure I want to go in, even for a minute."

"Nonsense!" said Davis. "It won't fall unless something shakes it," and he stepped forward into the corridor. Then he stopped suddenly and held up his hand. "Wait!" he said. "Listen!"

We listened with bated breath, but not a sound broke the stillness of the tomb.

"What was it you heard?" asked Creel, at last.

"I don't know," Davis answered hesitatingly. "Perhaps it wasn't anything—but it seemed to me there was a sort of rustling . . ."

"Like a woman's dress," I said. "I know. It's in there!"

"Nonsense!" said Davis again, and went resolutely forward.

I don't believe I should have followed, if Creel hadn't been behind me, pressing me on. I *knew* what was there—I *knew* what we should see—and every step required an effort of will, for my feet were like lead. And then my heart leaped suffocatingly, for Davis gave a sudden, sharp cry, as the torch was dashed from his hand and fell clattering to the floor. And the next instant, something brushed past me, with a rush of air, and a flicker as of wings . . .

Davis was fumbling around on the floor, swearing softly to himself; and then something clutched my arm.

"It's only me," said Creel's voice. And then, in a lower tone, "Did you feel it?"

"Yes," I said.

"Something that rushed past . . ."

"Yes."

And then the light shot out again.

"Come along, you fellows!" Davis called. "What are you standing there whispering about?"

"Billy and I were comparing notes on the ghost," said Creel. "What did it look like—you must have seen it."

"I saw nothing," said Davis, sharply. "There wasn't anything to see."

"I suppose you just dropped the torch," said Creel. "Let me see the back of your hand."

He turned Davis's hand over and directed the light of the torch upon it. Across the knuckles was a livid weal.

"Just like mine," he said. "No doubt that same stone fell out again!"

Davis snorted.

"I struck my hand against the corner of that pillar," he said.

"What was it brushed past us?"

"There wasn't anything brushed past us."

"Yes, there was; I felt it—so did Billy. It darted past with a rush of air . . ."

And then suddenly Davis threw back his head and laughed.

"I remember now," he said; "I *did* see the ghost—caught just a glimpse of it before the light went out."

"Well?" Creel demanded.

"Well," said Davis, "it was flying around the pillars, and it looked to me uncommonly like a bat. It may, of course, have been a ghost in disguise!"

Creel and I looked at each other a little sheepishly. I wasn't convinced; I was sure Creel wasn't, either. But we pretended we were—that seemed the only thing to do.

"I guess that's another one on us, Billy," said Creel, and looked around the tomb. "But where is that man Allen?"

Davis was sweeping it with his shaft of light.

"He isn't here," he said. "I'll wager . . ."

He stopped again, and this time we all heard the sound—a soft and regular breathing.

By a common impulse, we tiptoed forward. And there, on the bottom of the great sarcophagus, was Jimmy Allen. He was lying on his side, his head pillowed on his arm, and sleeping as calmly as any infant.

It was Creel who got his voice first.

"Well, I'll be damned!" he said softly. "He is crazy! To come over here alone . . ."

"He wasn't alone," I burst in, unable to pretend any longer. "That wasn't a bat we felt—I know it wasn't!"

Davis snorted impatiently, but Creel stood biting his lips and staring down at the sleeping man.

"That only makes it worse," he pointed out, at last.

I agreed with him . . .

And just then Jimmy stirred, and opened his eyes, and smiled calmly up at us.

"Hullo, fellows!" he said, precisely as he had once before on this very spot. "What are *you* doing here?"

"We were looking for you," answered Creel, savagely. "What do you mean by such a fool caper?"

"Oh," said Jimmy, "I thought I would see how it felt to sleep in this tomb again . . ."

"Again?" echoed Creel.

"I spent a night here some four thousand years ago," said Jimmy.

"Alone?"

"Oh, no," and he glanced at the rear wall. "I had company then—just as I had to-night."

"Look here, Jimmy," Creel blurted out, "of course it is none of my business, and I don't take any high moral stand—but I think you ought to cut it. Assignations in tombs are hardly decent . . ."

"What do you mean?" demanded Jimmy, sharply.

"Oh, we didn't see her," said Creel; "she was too quick for us. She knocked the torch out of Davis's hand and bolted . . ."

"No, she didn't," said Jimmy. "She is still back there. Put your ear against the wall and you can hear her."

Davis, with a strange glance at him, went to the back wall and placed an ear against it. There was something in his face which drew Creel and me to his side.

"There is undoubtedly a noise in there," he said, and Creel and I laid each an ear to the wall and listened with bated breath. For a moment I heard nothing; then there came a faint tap-tapping—I could fancy a tiny fist beating against the stones—beating for forty centuries! And I found myself turning a little giddy.

"It must be some stones dropping out of the roof," said Davis.

"It is Tina knocking to get out," said Jimmy, "just as she did the first night. I told you she hadn't died, but was waiting and hoping and beating against the wall!"

He was sitting up in the sarcophagus, and looked around at our startled faces with a mocking smile.

"Tina?" echoed Davis. "Was that her name?"

"It was my name for her."

"It sounds suspiciously modern," Creel commented. "I'm afraid your imagination is running dry, Jimmy."

"Oh, no," said Davis quietly, "Tina is an Egyptian name. There is a record of the family of Pet-Baal, a priest in the temple of Amen, and one of the daughters was named Tina."

"She knows I am here," continued Jimmy; "she sensed it, somehow, as soon as I entered. She's aching to get at me!"

"Love?" queried Davis.

"Oh, no!" said Jimmy, coolly. "The reverse! I don't blame her—she was only nineteen when I walled her up in there! But if she did get out, I would be in for a pretty strenuous time."

Davis strode over to Jimmy, his eyes gleaming with exasperation.

"Look here, Allen," he said, sternly, "do you expect me to believe this nonsense?"

"Oh, do as you please," said Jimmy with a shrug. "Whether you believe it or not, it's true!"

"You are speaking seriously?"

"Entirely so."

"You mean to tell me that whoever or whatever it was that was walled up in that tomb has survived for four thousand years?"

"You believe in the immortality of the soul, don't you?"

"Yes; but the soul doesn't waste forty centuries hanging around the place where the body is buried. It's out in the universe seeking new adventures! Anyway, how could a soul knock against a stone wall?"

"I don't precisely know," answered Jimmy, meditatively. "You see, all that sort of knowledge has somehow slipped away from me. But it seems to me I have heard of souls rapping against tables and things."

"Rubbish!" said Davis, and abandoned an argument which plainly led nowhere, and rejoined us at the wall.

"It doesn't sound like stones dropping out," commented Creel. "It's too quick and regular."

"It sounds like nothing," I said, "except a hand hammering to get out. It starts in slowly, and then quickens, and then stops for a while as though to get breath, and then starts in again."

"It's an Egyptian trick of some sort," said Davis, impatiently. "A pendulum arrangement, perhaps, set in motion by a current of air. They were experts at such tricks—their temples were full of them! We'll see for ourselves to-morrow."

"Oh," said Jimmy, suddenly standing up and looking at Davis, his eyes intent; "you're going in there to-morrow, are you?"

"I certainly am," snapped Davis, "and none of your cock-and-bull stories will stop me!"

"I'm not trying to stop you," said Jimmy. "I'm not afraid! Haven't I told you I would never be afraid again? But if you are going to let her out, I've got to get ready!" and he clambered slowly out of the sarcophagus. I saw that he was attired only in his pyjamas, and that his feet were bare.

"Didn't you wait to put on your shoes?" asked Creel.

"One doesn't need them in the sand," said Jimmy. "Are you ready to go back? All right, come along!"

As he turned toward the passage, I could have

sworn that the beating against the wall increased in fury, as though the prisoner in the tomb raged at being balked of its prey. Jimmy must have heard it too, for he smiled back over his shoulder.

"Revoir, Tina!" he cried. "Don't worry. You'll see me to-morrow!"

And then from in front of us came the crash of falling masonry.

"Good God!" cried Creel. "The roof!"

A moment later, Davis's torch was playing over the pile of debris which half-blocked the entrance.

"We can just get past," he said; "but move carefully," and he squeezed through into the outer chamber. "That was a near thing," he added, when we stood beside him, and he threw the light over the fissure in the roof from which the stones had fallen. "There's the bat!" he cried, and I saw its grey shape flit across the ceiling and disappear in the darkness of the corridor. "Perhaps you'll still talk to me of ghosts!" he added grimly.

Jimmy laughed.

"Have they been talking of ghosts?" he asked.

"They have been scared to death!" snapped Davis. "By shadows—by clouds—and by a bat! I'm glad to see that you, at least, have got some nerve left!"

Jimmy laughed again.

"Better than that!" he drawled. "I haven't *any* left. I have said good-bye to nerves for ever!"

He stretched his arms high above his head and yawned tremendously.

Davis glanced at him, then he turned his light back again to the crumbling roof.

"I'm afraid I'll have to brace it up to-morrow, before I go to work in there," he said. "Awful waste of time!"

"Why not let well enough alone, Davis?" asked Creel, impulsively. "You've got the coffin and the king's mummy. That ought to be glory enough!"

"But I haven't solved the mystery," snapped Davis. "Do you suppose I could rest content with anything less than that? Do you suppose I want to spend the rest of my life damning myself for a coward!"

"Of course you don't!" said Jimmy, quietly. "Play the game! That's right! That's what we all must do!" and he led the way into the outer air.

Silently we crossed the sand back to the oasis. As we neared it, the weird chant from the native camp floated again to our ears.

CHAPTER XXVIII

IN the midst of breakfast, next morning, Mustafa appeared and called Davis aside, and talked long and earnestly into his ear, while the explorer listened with evident anger and impatience.

We all of us watched the conference curiously, but without remark. In fact, we seemed to have lost the faculty of speaking, except when speech was necessary, even Ma Creel—and only those who know her can appreciate what a change that meant! For the most part, we sat moodily, with bent heads, as though there was something weighing us down. And that was it precisely—there *was* something weighing us down . . .

It was worse than ever that morning. It affected even our native servants. At any rate, the boy who waited on the table dropped a tray of dishes with a crash that made us jump nearly out of our skins, and the cook upset the coffee and had to make it over again. And all the time Mustafa talked and talked and waved his hands . . .

I suspected what the trouble was, and so, I think, did Creel. Perhaps Jimmy also was able to divine it, for he glanced at the two men from time to time with an enigmatic smile. There were dark circles under his eyes, and I saw how his hand trembled

when he raised his cup to his lips. Evidently there was less truth than bravado in his boast that he had said good-bye to nerves! As for Mlle. Roland, who, as usual, sat opposite him, her pallor was startling, and her eyes were like coals of fire. I was sure she was burning with fever; and I have wondered since if she had a presentiment . . .

Davis came back at last, and sat down without looking at us, and went on with his breakfast.

"Well," said Ma Creel, "what was it about? You'll have to tell us sooner or later, you know!"

"It is nothing very serious," Davis answered. "The natives have got an idea that there is something the matter with that tomb, and they have notified Mustafa that they won't enter it again."

"You don't care, do you, since you've got the mummy out?"

"I had intended to—ah—explore it a bit further," explained Davis.

"What do they think is the matter with the place?" Ma Creel demanded.

"They think it's haunted—they all believe in witchcraft, you know. A piece of the roof fell in last night, and they consider that a warning to stay out. I had to pull down part of a wall to get the coffin out, and it weakened the vaulting."

"Then it is unsafe?"

"Mustafa and I are going to rebuild the wall. You said I could have Mustafa," he added, turning to Creel.

"Yes, take him," said Creel. "I won't need him. Our principal scenes to-day are the ones showing Jimmy's finish—those and a few fillers to connect things up."

"What is Jimmy's finish?" Davis asked, with what was for him unusual curiosity.

"The siren—the reincarnation, you know, of the woman he had buried alive—lures him out into the desert; and then, at the moment he catches her and crushes her to him, she changes to a mummy in his arms; and he goes mad when he finds that he can't throw the thing off, and wanders around with it clinging to him, until he finally falls exhausted in the sand and dies."

"Cheerful stuff, I must say!" grunted Davis. "Do you mean to tell me any American audience will stand for such rubbish?"

"They'll eat it up!" said Creel, cheerfully. "And now you two run along," he added to Jimmy and Mlle. Roland, "and get into your togs. I will want you first in your harem costume, Princess, and you in your khaki, Jimmy. Where is that mummy, Digby? Over in the ruins?"

"No; I've got it in the property-tent," said the careful Digby.

"Well, get it out; and, Billy, be sure you take plenty of film."

"I'll be off and do some real work!" scoffed Davis, and presently I saw him and Mustafa crossing toward the ruins.

Half an hour later, we were hard at work. First we did a scene showing Jimmy and Creel carrying the papier-mâché mummy between them over from the ruins, and then I panned them up to the entrance to the tent. Then we rolled back part of the top to let in the light, and I shot them as they brought the mummy into the tent and laid it on a table, which had taken the place of one of the cots. Then they went to bed (a lighted lamp and the tinting to be given the film subsequently indicating that night had fallen); and then we changed the lighting so

that it would be concentrated in a sort of soft, uncanny glow on the table, and Mlle. Roland took the mummy's place there, and I reeled back and made a double-exposure ; and Jimmy woke up and saw her lying there, gazing at him alluringly under half-closed lids, for all the world like that picture of Venus by Cabanel at the Met.

He raised his head and looked at her a moment ; then sat up in bed ; and then, as though the lure was irresistible, he slowly rose from the cot and stole toward her ; and she slipped from the table like a snake, looking back at him over her shoulder, and glided out of the tent. He hesitated a moment, glanced at his sleeping partner, and followed.

And then Creel woke up, discovered Jimmy and the mummy both missing, and rushed to the door, and stared out into the night. It was well done, and I felt sure would get across with any audience. All of these scenes, as well as the ones which followed, would be tinted, and so would be doubly effective.

Outside the tent, I panned them to the edge of the desert—Jimmy following the siren ; and then Creel in search of them ; and there we had to stop, for it was too hot to think of venturing out on the sand.

"We will wait till afternoon for the finish," said Creel. "You two go and rest—you've got some hard scenes ahead. But if you do as well this afternoon as you did this morning, it will be a hummer !"

"Thanks !" said Jimmy, and they walked away together, back toward the tents.

"Queer couple that," said Creel, meditatively, looking after them. "I can't for the life of me make out whether they hate each other or are desperately in love. What's stranger still, my wife hasn't been able to make up *her* mind, either. And she's a regular clairvoyant in that sort of thing !"

"You would laugh if I told you what I think," I said.

"No, I wouldn't—I know what you think. You think that yarn of Jimmy's is true."

"Yes, I do!" I said.

Creel looked at me curiously.

"I'm not so sure myself that it isn't!" he said, at last. "I'm ashamed to admit it—but down at the bottom of my heart, I'm afraid—I'm afraid . . ."

"Of what Davis is going to let loose—well, so am I!"

"And yet I can't but admire the old sport," said Creel. "He would go ahead and open that wall, if he knew all hell was behind it!"

"So would you!" I said.

"Yes, I suppose I would," Creel agreed, and looked out across the sand. "Suppose we walk over and see how he's getting along."

We found him and Mustafa sweating over a rough reconstruction of the masking wall, which was still some feet from the ceiling.

"This is an awful job," panted Davis, "and I don't believe it is necessary. No more of the roof has fallen. Damn those fool natives, anyway!"

"Come on to lunch and rest a while," said Creel. "You'll be having a heat-stroke, first thing you know!"

"You have another try at those fellows, Mustafa," Davis directed. "Offer double pay to any who will come over here and build up this wall. Tell them I shan't ask them to enter the inner tomb. And make it clear to them that they *lose* double pay for every hour they won't work."

"Vurry good, saar," said Mustafa, and departed.

"You haven't started to open up that wall, then?" Creel inquired.

"No," said Davis; "I don't dare do that till this roof is safe." Then he looked at Creel curiously. "Good heavens, man, *you* don't believe that ridiculous tale!"

"I don't know what to believe," answered Creel, moodily. "So many things have happened . . ."

"Nothing has happened," rapped out Davis, "that isn't susceptible of a perfectly commonplace explanation—such as bats, for example!"

"Perhaps you are right," admitted Creel, reflectively; "and then again perhaps you are wrong. Anyway, I'm taking no chances. I am going to get my picture so far finished this afternoon, that it won't matter *what* happens."

"Nothing is going to happen!" broke in Davis impatiently. "I hope I am going to find another mummy—it *may* be the body of a woman who was buried alive; but take my word for it, it will be quite as dead and innocuous as that papier-mâché fake you brought along with you!"

"Well, I hope so!" said Creel, and we walked back together to the tents for lunch.

"Got through the wall yet?" Jimmy inquired, in the course of that meal.

"Oh, no," Davis answered; "I've got to brace up that roof first."

"Expect to get through this afternoon?"

"Yes—at least I will make a hole big enough to see what is inside. If there is nothing there, I won't have to go any farther."

"Oh, yes," said Jimmy, "there is something there!"

"I think myself there is," agreed Davis coolly; and after that the conversation languished.

Half an hour later, as I was wandering about

trying to find a place cool enough to take a nap in, I came upon Jimmy seated at the edge of the oasis nearest the ruins, carefully braiding together some leather thongs which he had secured somewhere—perhaps from Digby, who had everything. For a moment, I didn't understand what it was he was doing; then I saw that he was making a whip—and a particularly vicious-looking whip, at that!

"What is that for?" I asked, sitting down and watching him.

"Don't you remember, there was to be a whip," said Jimmy, and turned a thong up into a loop at the thick end to go around his wrist.

"But all that has been cut out," I reminded him.

"Just the same, I rather fancy I'll need a whip," said Jimmy, and to the other end he attached a cruel lash that would cut through any hide. "There!" and he cracked it. "What do you think of that?"

"I don't like the looks of it," I answered candidly. "What are you going to do with it?"

"Never mind," he said. "This isn't your game, Billy—you ought to thank heaven for that!" and he walked away and left me alone, very uncomfortable in my mind. I didn't like to imagine how he was going to use that whip—and yet I couldn't help it—and I had a vision of cruel streaks of red across white shoulders . . .

When we started out to take the final scenes, there was a little bulge around Jimmy's waist under his pyjamas which I was certain was the whip. But I soon forgot all about it in the excitement of our work.

Our morning scenes had ended at the edge of the oasis, with Jimmy, just from his bed, following the siren through the moonlight. We picked the story

up there, and showed her luring him across the desert; then other scenes of Creel following the trail in the sand, losing it and picking it up again. It was great, for if ever a woman looked like a vampire, Mlle. Roland did as she enticed him on and on, keeping just beyond his reach, gliding from between his fingers as he tried to grasp her, with a tantalizing smile parting her red lips, and her eyes glowing with hatred. And as the game went on, Jimmy's eyes began to glow, too, and the sweat ran down across his cheeks, and he fairly panted for breath.

We did quite a good deal of this, for the chase was supposed to continue throughout the night and into the next day—we would show the sunrise in one scene, if we could work it; but finally Creel indicated that we had enough.

"All right," he said; "we'll do the final scene here."

I don't know whether or not Jimmy heard him, but he sprang forward, swift as a dart, caught the girl before she could escape, and crushed her to him.

"I've got you, damn you!" he said, between his teeth. "I've got you at last!"

She fought to get away—she fought like a demon; but he held her tight, and slowly bent back her head with a remorseless hand and kissed her on the lips. And at his touch, her eyes closed, a shiver ran through her, and her arms fell limp. . . .

"Stop, Billy, stop!" yelled Creel. "Hold your pose, Jimmy. Bring up that mummy, Digby! By heaven, the girl's fainted!" he added, and ran forward and caught her from Jimmy's arms. "Stand still, man! We'll look after her in a minute. Reel back six feet, Billy. Now, Jimmy, take the mummy—hold it as you were holding the girl—that's

right! Now kiss it! Kiss it! All right, Billy!" and I ran the six feet through again. "Now! Go ahead! You see it's the mummy, Jimmy! Stare at it a moment—then try to throw it off! Stop, camera!" and he ran forward and fastened the mummy's arms about Jimmy's neck. "All right! Try to throw it off! Fight it!" and I took a thrilling scene while Jimmy fought with the clinging monster, and finally dropped exhausted to the sand. "Great!" said Creel, and held up his hand to me to stop.

All this while he had been holding the girl's limp body over one arm, and gesticulating with the other; and now, at last, he had time to look at her; and just as he did, she straightened up and rubbed her eyes.

"Feeling better?" he asked.

"I am quite well," she said, and stood away from him.

"Sure?"

"I am ready to go on."

Her voice was utterly expressionless and her face was pale as death; and she was rubbing her lips with the back of her hand, as though they had been poisoned. And all the while, Jimmy was looking on with that infernal smile of his. I've got the word for it at last—infernal!

Creel looked at her and then looked at Jimmy, and his face hardened. There was really nothing to complain of, for that long, passionate kiss was strictly in the part, but I saw that Creel wasn't pleased. A kiss can be faked, you know; most of them are.

"All right," he said. "Sit down under the umbrella and rest. I won't need you for a while."

"Thank you," she said, and went over and sat

down under the big white umbrella Digby had brought along, while Creel went ahead with the final scene.

I am bound to say that Jimmy did it well. He staggered on, with the mummy clinging to him, around and around; and finally he managed to fight it loose, and threw it to the ground and smashed its head in with his foot. And right there we did another double-exposure, so that at the instant he had his foot raised, the mummy changed to the siren—but he set his face, and brought his foot down upon her head, and fell upon her and tore her limb from limb—only it was the mummy's blackened members he strewed about him on the sand. And then, after a period of unconsciousness, he awoke in his right mind, with the fragments about him; and even as he stared at them, they seemed to run together and change to a living woman; and then, as he jumped at it, back to fragments again.

No wonder he went mad, and tore those fragments into little shreds, and scattered the shreds to all the corners of the compass. And then his senses returned again, and he tried to get back to the oasis, and wandered this way and that; discovering at last, that he was travelling in a circle; and finally dropped from exhaustion.

And so Creel, in the character of his comrade, found him, just before he died, and the last thing his eyes saw was the girl's face, smiling down at him, in mocking triumph, over Creel's shoulder.

So ended "A King in Babylon."

CHAPTER XXIX

WE were not very far from the oasis, but the journey back to it seemed a thousand miles, I was so weary and overwrought—and a moving-picture camera is no light burden. Mlle. Roland seemed ready to drop at every step, but she declined Creel's proffered arm and plodded doggedly on through the sand. Jimmy, at the rear of the procession, and apparently quite fresh despite the fact that he had worked harder than any of us, drew forth his whip and amused himself by cracking it; and somehow it seemed to me that he was driving the girl on with it. I could see her start, every time it cracked, as though the lash had been laid across her shoulders.

Creel, at last, could stand it no longer, and turned angrily and shouted to him to put the whip away. He didn't put it away, but he stopped cracking it. Once, when I glanced over my shoulder, I saw that he was running it lovingly through his fingers; and his eyes were on the drooping figure of the girl ahead of him.

We reached the oasis at last, and Mlle. Roland went straight to her tent, and presumably to bed. At least, I saw no more of her. Jimmy dived into our tent, to change from his pyjamas; while Creel

and Digby and I went on to the property-tent to get rid of our burdens.

"Thank God that's over!" said Creel, as I was sealing up the film. "I wouldn't go through it again for a million dollars!"

Of course, that was just a manner of speaking. I knew quite well that, had he had any reason to think any portion of the film a failure, he would have ordered a re-take without an instant's hesitation. But I had developed a few inches from the end of every spool, and had found them all as brilliant and clear and beautifully-lighted as any I had ever done.

"I am going to get away from here as soon as I can," Creel added. "I can't stand it any longer. We'll start to-morrow, if possible, Digby, so get your props together. If we get safe back to Luxor . . ."

"Why shouldn't we get back to Luxor?" I demanded.

"No reason that I know of. *When* we get safe back to Luxor, perhaps I'll take a few scenes there, just for the background. What do you think of that whip business?" he asked suddenly, in another tone.

"I don't like it."

"Where did he get the whip?"

"He made it—I happened to see him doing it. You thought of using a whip, you remember."

"Yes—but he knew I had cut out those scenes. Besides, there's a whip among the props."

There was a moment's silence, then Creel turned to me, his face very grim.

"Did it seem to you that he was using it on the girl?" he asked.

"Yes, it did," I said; "and I couldn't have stood it much longer."

At that moment Jimmy stuck his head in at the door.

"I'm going over to see how the professor's getting on," he said. "Don't you want to come along? I sort of feel that I can promise you a thrill or two."

Creel and I looked at each other. I think we both felt that we had had thrills enough to last for a long time—but we also had a burning curiosity as to what would happen next. It proved too much for us.

"All right," said Creel, shortly, reading consent in my eyes. "Come along, Billy," and we joined Jimmy outside the tent.

I saw then that he still carried the whip in his hand.

"What in blazes are you doing with that thing?" Creel demanded. "I'm sick of the sight of it."

"It will come in handy, I fancy," said Jimmy, coolly, and cracked it like a pistol-shot.

The sun was dropping toward the horizon as we came out upon the sand, and again I heard rising from the native camp that weird chant to drive off evil spirits.

"They're taking no chances to-night," commented Jimmy; "they are not waiting for the sun to set. I don't know but they are wise!" he added grimly.

I wondered how he knew the meaning of the chant. Perhaps Davis had told him—though that seemed hardly likely; perhaps he just knew!

Creel protested that he had no patience with such superstition; but Jimmy only smiled ironically, without replying, and cracked his whip again. And I remembered how I had seen the natives sleeping soundly the night before, in full faith that the chant protected them; and I couldn't for the life of me

see why that sort of faith deserved to be called superstition, any more than any other sort. Surely, the final test for any sort of faith is whether or not it works!

We found the excavation in deepening shadow and descended the steps in silence. None of us had thought to bring a light, and it was very dark inside the tomb, but we could see dimly the rude wall which Davis and Mustafa had built to brace the roof. I confess it looked none too secure to me; but Jimmy passed on into the corridor with scarcely a glance at it, and Creel and I followed. And then I heard, from the inner chamber, the ring of iron on stone which told that Davis was working at the wall. It was Mustafa who was doing the pounding, with Davis holding the torch. He turned quickly at the sound of our footsteps and flashed the torch over us.

"Hello!" he said. "You're just in time. We will have a hole through the wall in another minute." Then he saw the whip in Jimmy's hand. "What is that for?" he demanded, with an acerbity which surprised me.

"To keep that devil inside from coming out!" said Jimmy.

He spoke with a loud bravado, which his pale face and strangely shining eyes belied.

Davis gave him one long, searching look, then turned back to the wall.

"Go ahead, Mustafa," he said, and I saw that one of the stones, about a foot square, was loose. A few more strokes of the heavy crowbar, and it was ready to come out. "Stand back, now," said Davis, and instinctively Creel and I shrank away against the sarcophagus. Only Jimmy held his

ground, his whip-hand poised to strike. "All right, Mustafa!" And while I held my breath, Mustafa threw all his weight on the bar; the stone trembled, slid forward, and fell with a crash upon the floor of the tomb.

I don't know what it was I feared—perhaps some such awful spectre issuing from that hole as greeted the fisherman in the Arabian Nights when he broke the seal on the bottle he had drawn from the sea; but I *do* know that a prickle of terror ran up my spine and off across my scalp as I stared at that square of blackness—as we all stared for a long minute—and nothing happened—nothing . . .

"Aren't you coming, Tina?" called Jimmy, an ugly snarl in his voice. "I'm here! I'm waiting!"

And just then there was a sort of flicker in that black square, and like a flash Jimmy sent his lash cracking toward it.

"Ah, ha!" he cried. "You didn't know I had the whip! Come out, Tina! I haven't forgotten how to use it! Come out!"

The words conjured before my eyes again that vision of white shoulders streaked with blood, of a merciless hand rising and falling . . .

"Oh, shut up!" snarled Davis, and I guessed that he had seen the vision too. "I've had enough of that nonsense!"

"Didn't you see her?" Jimmy demanded. "She was coming out . . ."

"No, I didn't see her!" Davis retorted, and with a sublime courage which I shall never cease to admire, he dragged the fallen stone aside, dropped to his knees, torch in hand, and peered into the darkness of the inner tomb.

I heard his deep gasp of astonishment.

"By George, it's there!" he muttered hoarsely.

"Of course she's there!" mocked Jimmy. "Haven't I told you from the first? Didn't you hear her beating to get out last night? Didn't you see her a moment ago?"

He cracked his whip again, and leered around at us; and I swear, if any man was ever mad, Jimmy Allen was mad at that moment—stark, staring mad! I felt as though I were going mad myself . . .

"Rubbish!" said Davis, harshly, still peering through the hole. "She's as dead as door-nails!"

"No, she isn't!" Jimmy cried. "She's fooling you! She's just waiting . . ."

And again he cracked his whip.

But Davis paid no further heed to him. He remained at the hole for some time; then he rose slowly to his feet and handed me the torch.

"Take a look," he said. "It's a mummy, right enough," I heard him saying over my shoulder as I knelt before the hole; "or rather, a body shrivelled up—I haven't a doubt it was walled-up alive and left to die. It's a great find—there are only three others like it . . ."

And then his voice faded from my ears, for there, on the floor of the inner tomb, I saw it . . .

It was lying on its side with its face toward me—its knees doubled up, its hands clasped as though in prayer—for all the world just such a ghastly figure as we had brought with us from New York—and dead as door-nails—there could be no doubt of that!

And then, quite suddenly, I realized that it was watching me—that its eyes were open—I could see the light from my torch reflected in them—and the features seemed to fill out—the blackened lips parted in a smile—a fiendish smile . . .

I stared fascinated, horror-stricken, till I could endure that gaze no longer . . .

Davis caught the torch from my hand, as I fell back with a hoarse cry.

"What's the matter, man?" he asked.

"The eyes!" I gasped. "She was looking at me!"

Davis caught me savagely by the arm.

"Get up!" he said, harshly. "Don't be a fool! Get up!"

I staggered to my feet.

"But the eyes!" I gasped. "I saw them . . ."

"You saw nothing of the sort. There are two ornaments or jewels on the forehead which reflect the light—that's what you saw!"

But I knew better. It was no ornament that I had seen; it was a pair of living eyes, glittering with malice! And the evil smile upon the lips—and the face, black and distorted, which yet somehow seemed familiar . . .

And I staggered against a pillar and caught myself from falling, as I realized why it seemed familiar.

And then I saw that Creel was looking in. Would he recognize her too; would he . . .

"I don't know what you fellows are talking about," he said, impatiently. "I can see the mummy, right enough—it looks exactly like my papier-mâché fake—but its back is toward us . . ."

"Let me see," broke in Davis, and pulled him away and snatched the torch and dropped to his knees.

I pressed my palms against my burning eye-balls. Would I never get that horrid vision out of them—that cruel face—the face of the siren who had lured Jimmy Allen out across the sands . . .

Davis rose to his feet, a line of perplexity between his brows.

"It's strange," he said, "but the body undoubtedly *has* turned over. Perhaps the draught of air through the opening caused it to relax—the change of temperature. The mummy of Rameses II. raised its arm, you know." And he stood staring at the hole, scrabbling his beard with nervous fingers.

"Let me look," said Jimmy, and took the torch from Davis's hand and fell to his knees.

The next instant he had started back with a sharp cry of pain.

"You would, would you!" he cried, and sprang to his feet and brought down his whip against the lower edge of the opening; and I saw, with a spasm of terror, that there was a streak of blood across his cheek. "She nearly got me," he said, with a wry smile, wiping the blood away. "I might have guessed she'd try! Clawing out eyes is one of her favourite diversions—as Digby can tell you!"

And I went faint again at the implication of the words . . .

"There's a spur on that next stone," rapped Davis. "You scratched your cheek on that!"

But he was evidently shaken—and I couldn't see any spur . . .

"Did I?" sneered Jimmy. "Well, have it so! But I would advise you to put that stone back into place for the night—and to wedge it in well!"

And with that he turned and walked out of the tomb.

There was a moment's silence, then Davis handed the torch to Creel.

"Get hold of the stone, Mustafa," he said, hoarsely, and they lifted it between them and tried to thrust it back into the hole.

Half-way it stuck.

"Let go," said Davis; "I can push it in," and he knelt before the hole and pushed with all his strength.

I saw the sweat break out across his neck with the effort; and slowly, slowly, as though some weaker arm on the other side found itself overpowered, the stone slid into place.

"There," said Davis; "that's safe, I think;" and he rose and mopped his shining face. "Don't think," he added violently, "that I did that because of Allen's insane suggestion. I was going to do it anyway—to protect the body. It will probably fall to pieces at a breath."

Then at something he saw in our faces, he stopped suddenly, and with a gesture of rage and impatience, led the way from the tomb.

CHAPTER XXX.

DARKNESS had come while we had lingered in the tomb. The stars were incredibly bright, and along the east a line of light heralded the moon. The air was delightfully fresh and cool, and we drew deep breaths of it as we climbed quickly out of the excavation. We were all more deeply shaken than we cared to admit—even Davis, I am sure, felt his scepticism tottering!—but, under the influence of the perfect night, insensibly our spirits brightened.

Davis was the first to cast off the spell which had fallen upon us. He took off his helmet, and threw back his head, and straightened his shoulders, as though flinging away some burden. Then he looked toward the East, where the band of light was broadening.

“The moon will be full to-night,” he said; and his face lighted suddenly with the old raillery. “It’s at the full of the moon, you know,” he added, with an ironical glance at us, “that ghosts are especially active. They simply *can’t* stay quiet and behave themselves under a full moon!”

“So I have heard,” said Creel. “Therefore we’d better keep our eyes open!”

And just then, from the native camp, the sound of that ceaseless chant floated to our ears.

"We might go over and sleep with the fellahin," Davis suggested, "inside their magic circle. Then the ghosts couldn't get us!"

Creel walked on for a moment in silence.

"Just the same," he burst out, "I'll be glad when this night is over! Thank heaven, it's our last night here!"

Davis stopped and stared at him.

"Is it our last night?" he asked.

"It is if you can get ready to leave to-morrow. The picture is done—or practically so; I can finish it at Luxor, or even in New York. And I think for all our sakes—but especially for the sake of Jimmy and the Princess—the sooner we get away from here the better."

"I suppose you are right," agreed Davis, and walked on slowly. "Anyway, if you are ready to go, that settles it. It's your expedition."

"Perhaps another day wouldn't make so much difference," Creel began; "I suppose we could stand it . . ."

"No," Davis broke in; "I can easily finish things up to-morrow. There is nothing left to do except to get that body out, and examine the tomb it is in—two or three hours' work at most."

"All right," said Creel. "That's settled, then. I confess I'll be glad when I see the last of this place! So will all of us, I think."

A moment later we reached the tents, and found Ma Creel and Mollie anxiously awaiting us. They had an unpleasant bit of news. Mlle. Roland had sunk again into a cataleptic sleep.

"I'm worried about that girl," said Ma Creel, as we sat down to dinner. "She's not well—she ought to have a doctor, or nerve specialist, or something. You oughtn't to keep her out here in the desert, Warrie. It's not right. She isn't fit to work!"

"I know it," said Creel. "Therefore we are going to start back to-morrow."

"Oh, fine!" cried Ma Creel. And then she looked at him, like the good wife and helpmate she was. "Is the picture done?" she asked.

"All but some finishing touches which I can give it anywhere," Creel assured her.

And then Ma Creel's eyes turned to Davis, and I knew she was thinking of him, too. But of course she would! Ma Creel always thought of everybody but herself. Davis caught her glance, and understood.

"I will be ready, too," he said. "I've only got two or three hours' more work over there."

"Then everything's all right," said Ma Creel, with satisfaction. "And I am glad! It will be a good thing for all of us. There's something wrong out here—I don't know what—but we've all felt it." And she looked about the board, and no one said her nay.

"There's a curse on the place!" said Mollie, suddenly.

"Yes,—I've felt that, too," agreed Ma Creel. "We're all nervous and overwrought. As for Jimmy Allen, he's quite mad, I think!"

"Where is Jimmy?" asked Creel, and looked about as though missing him for the first time—though there was something in his air which told me that he had missed him from the moment of our return.

I certainly had; and I had lost no time in assuring myself that he was not in the tent. I had feared that he, too, was sleeping that terrible sleep, which I somehow dreaded most of all. I had breathed a deep sigh of relief when I found that his bed was empty.

"He isn't in the tent," I said.

"No," said Ma Creel. "He went striding past half an hour ago like a man possessed, cracking a whip he had got somewhere. He's mad, I tell you! Wasn't he over at the ruins with you?"

"Yes; but he left before we did. What did he say?"

"He didn't say anything. He never looked at us. He went right on past, as though we weren't there, and disappeared in that clump of palms over toward the native camp. What does that queer chanting mean?"

"Oh, just some of their superstitious hocus-pocus," answered Creel, carelessly; but he glanced a little anxiously toward the native camp, and I knew that he was wondering, as I was, what Jimmy was doing over there. Calling for volunteers to fight the devil, perhaps . . .

I rather expected to hear Jimmy's whip cracking and to see him come striding back, before the meal was over; but there was no sign of him, and as we rose from table, Creel drew Davis and me to one side.

"What deviltry do you suppose Jimmy is cooking up over there?" he asked.

"I don't suppose he is cooking up any," Davis retorted. "He has probably gone to claim the protection of the chant and the magic circle, as a king of ancient Egypt. We will find him squatting in the midst of the natives, like one of them."

"Well, I am going to see," said Creel; and we two followed him.

As usual, we found that Davis was right, in a way. Jimmy was there. But he wasn't squatting among the natives like one of them. He was sitting on a hummock of sand, with the natives ranged

around in a respectful circle, for all the world like a savage king and his court. Directly in front of him knelt the priest, or medicine-man, or whatever his proper name was, with eyes closed, and head thrown back in a sort of ecstasy, bellowing the four or five notes of the chant from a pair of leathern lungs.

In his right hand, Jimmy held the whip, and he was gazing steadily out across the sand in the direction of the ruins, now clearly outlined against the rising moon.

"Great Scott!" whispered Creel, at last. "If I could only get that on the screen!"

I couldn't help smiling at the way the great passion of his life cropped up, even at such a moment!

"Well, why not?" asked Davis satirically.

"It can't be done," said Creel, with a gesture of despair. "The picture—yes, I might get that—flat black figures on a white ground. But how could I get the atmosphere, the colour, the wind through the palms, the desert perfume, the sound of that weird chant? I tell you, Davis, the throwing of flat black images on a screen is merely the first step in the moving-picture business—we haven't arrived—we're just getting started; gradually we will learn how to add the rest—colour, sound, atmosphere—we'll show people in the round, as they really look—we'll appeal to all the senses . . ."

"I don't see why you can't get atmosphere, now," said Davis, "by the use of perfumes, controlled by fans or by some similar device."

"Perhaps we could," Creel agreed, and fell silent, turning the suggestion over in his mind.

"What are we going to do about Jimmy?" I asked, at last.

"My advice would be to leave him here," said Davis. Creel shook himself out of his thoughts.

"Yes, that's best," he agreed. "He would probably refuse to go back with us, anyway; and he's safe here."

"He's safe anywhere," Davis put in.

"I know," said Creel; "but being safe isn't the whole thing—*believing* you're safe is just as important. He believes he's safe here, so this is the best place for him. But look how he stares over toward the ruins. He's waiting for something."

"He's waiting for his Tina to work that stone out of place and come after him!" mocked Davis.

But I cast a startled glance out across the sand; undoubtedly that was what Jimmy expected; I almost fancied I could see that dark, terrible, ape-like figure stealing along in the shadow of a ridge . . .

"Let us go back," said Creel, abruptly, and we left Jimmy throned in the midst of his court.

We found Mollie and Ma Creel waiting for us with anxious faces, for they had seen us go away together and had suspected that something was wrong. They listened in silence to Creel's account of Jimmy's eccentricity, told as lightly as Creel could tell it.

"I knew he was crazy," said Ma Creel, when her husband had finished. "I've known it for days! But this is the worst yet!"

"Well, he's doing no harm over there," said Creel, "so we decided to let him alone. Is the Princess still asleep?"

"Yes—if you want to call it that."

"What else would you call it?" Creel demanded, glad to get the talk away from Jimmy.

"She's in a trance—she's not asleep at all. She needs help worse than Jimmy!"

"We can't start before to-morrow, can we?" Creel retorted, for he felt something accusing in his wife's look. "Come along, Digby; I'll help you get things together."

Davis had already disappeared into our tent, where I could see him, in fancy, bending above the hieroglyphics on the coffin of Sekenyen-Rē. I looked at Mollie and then I looked at Ma Creel, and just at that instant she glanced up and caught my eye.

"You two get along out of here," she said. "I don't want you bothering me. I've got some thinking to do."

"If you're sure you don't mind," I began.

"Mind! Of course I don't mind! But I don't see how Mollie endures that pipe!"

"Oh, I rather like it!" said Mollie, to my intense astonishment; and in another moment we were walking away under the palms together, and my heart was beating like a trip-hammer, for I knew that my great moment was at hand. "Let us go out to the edge of the desert," she added. "It will be beautiful under the moon. Have you noticed that the moon is full to-night?"

"Yes," I answered, and couldn't find another word.

So we walked on in silence till we came to the place where we had sat two nights before, right at the edge of the sand; and I spread her cloak on the ground, and she sat down, and I sat down very close to her, and my heart lightened suddenly, for she didn't draw away.

But my voice still stuck in my throat; vanished utterly were all those eloquent periods which I had rehearsed in private, in order to be ready when the moment came. And Mollie, too, was silent. Perhaps it was the awful panorama which stretched

away in front of us that rendered speaking difficult—ridge after ridge of drifted sand mounting to the horizon, one behind another like waves of a sea—a sea suddenly arrested and frozen motionless, but ready at any instant to rush down upon us and engulf us. It was suffused with light—the darkness seemed somehow filtered through with rose—and occasionally a wisp of vapour floated up like a sheeted ghost from the dark valleys between the sand-ridges. I felt that anything could happen there—anything . . .

“It is lovely, lovely,” said Mollie, at last. “But I’m glad it is our last night—I’m so glad of that!”

“Yes,” I agreed; “so am I.”

“Do you really believe it is just the heat and worrying about the picture?” Mollie asked, and I knew she was thinking of Jimmy Allen. “Tell me honestly, Billy. Do you?”

“No,” I said, “I don’t. There have been too many things . . .”

“Things like—like those we saw?”

“Yes, like those. Davis laughs at them—he has an explanation for everything; and at first I thought he was right. But when things you can’t understand keep right on happening, you feel that—that something is wrong.”

“How would he explain what—we saw?”

“As cloud shadows—or wisps of vapour like those out yonder. And of course they *might* have been. In fact, I suppose it is silly to think them anything else—and yet . . .”

“Yes,” said Mollie, “‘and yet’—that’s just it! I am sure, somehow, they were *not* shadows or wisps of vapour . . .”

She fell silent, but she looked so sweet and tender

sitting there in the moonlight, that I suddenly found myself taking her hand and drawing her to me.

"Mollie," I began, but my voice was shaking so I had to stop.

And then she looked up at me, and her eyes were full of tears, and she just snuggled against me and laid her head on my shoulder . . .

"I *do* love you, Billy," she said. "I've loved you all along!"

But presently she stirred and sat erect and held me away from her and looked at me.

"You're sure you forgive me, Billy?" she asked. "You're *sure*?"

"Forgive you?" I echoed in amazement. "What for?"

"For—for the uniforms and things."

I managed to pull a serious face.

"Well," I said, "you *did* go the limit, you know, Mollie!"

"I know it—it wasn't nice. I oughtn't to have let him hold my hand——"

"Let *who* hold your hand?" I demanded.

"But it made me so angry to see how *she* monopolized you . . ."

"*Who* monopolized me?"

"That—vampire!" And she was laughing at me all the time—and at you. She was just doing it to annoy me and make trouble . . ."

"Nonsense!" I protested. "And you mustn't call her a vampire—it isn't nice."

"I don't care! It's what she is—I have felt it from the first! And I could see she hated me. That was why she made up to you. I tried to get her away, but she wouldn't even let me introduce

anybody else—she said you were enough. It was horrid! No wonder I—I flirted a little.”

“Well, *I* didn’t,” I said, severely. “I never held anybody’s hand. There was never a hint of flirtation between Mlle. Roland and me. Anybody could have heard every word we uttered.”

Mollie snuggled to me again with a little sigh of content.

“I was sure of it,” she said; “but I wanted you to tell me. And you forgive me?”

“On one condition.”

“What is it?”

“That you never do it again!”

“You’re a goose!” she said. “You ought to have taken a whip to me!”

“I will,” I said, “after this!”

And then suddenly I thought of Jimmy’s whip, and of him sitting over there in the midst of that circle of crouching blacks . . .

And involuntarily I looked out again across the desert . . .

The rosy glow was fading; the shadows in the folds of the sand seemed deeper, like valleys of blackness between ridges of light . . .

From one of the valleys, a shadow detached itself . . .

It was moving toward us; it came slowly, with deliberation, hugging the shadows wherever possible, seeking to hide itself behind every ridge, skulking low across the ribbons of light; for all the world like one of the natives trying to sneak back to camp unseen—a native who had stripped off his clothes—lean and ugly . . .

And then my heart leaped sickeningly, for I saw what it was . . .

CHAPTER XXXI

I SUPPOSE Mollie felt the convulsive shiver which I was utterly unable to suppress, for she raised her head from my shoulder and looked up into my face; and I tried to smile as I met her eyes, but couldn't. And then she drew away, though I tried to hold her, and slowly turned her head and looked out across the sand . . .

I felt her stiffen with horror as she saw the thing, though I knew she couldn't guess . . .

Slowly and stealthily it crept forward, keeping to the shadow wherever possible; but there were instants when there was no cover for it, and it stood revealed in the moonlight—black, terrible, sickening; and then it would melt again into a shadow, and for an instant disappear; and then it would appear again, nearer—always nearer.

"What is it?" Mollie breathed at last.

"It's only one of the natives," I answered, hoarsely.

"No, it isn't! It's something else! You know it's something else!"

"What else could it be?" I countered feebly.

"I don't know—something terrible, or you wouldn't be so frightened! It looks like—it looks like—oh, Billy!" and she hid her face on my shoulder, shaking with horror. "It's the mummy!"

"No, no," I protested. "Nonsense! Jimmy tore it to bits this afternoon!"

"Then it has put itself together again—or, or . . ."

She shook convulsively, and buried her face deeper.

"Billy!" she breathed. "It's another one—it's a real one . . ."

"No, no!" I said, and patted her hair and held her close.

But I was shaking, too—for I knew! I knew!

"I can't stand it!" she moaned softly. "It's too awful—I can't stand it! I'm going—I'm going to faint!"

"No, you're not!" I said, and held her tight, and pressed my cheek against her hair . . .

And always, out across the sand, the thing crept nearer.

"Is it—is it still coming?" she whispered, at last.

"Yes."

"Don't stir!" she gasped. "If it—if it should see us!"

"It isn't us it's after!" I said hoarsely.

Her convulsive trembling stopped for a moment.

"How do you know? Who is it after?"

"It's after Jimmy," I answered, in the merest breath. "God help him!"

"Jimmy?"

"He knows," I said. "He's watching for it!"

And then I suddenly realized his danger. If it should spring upon him from behind, before he saw it . . .

I don't know what dreadful thing I feared—withered fingers at his throat—lipless fangs—I didn't dare think of it . . .

"We must warn him," I said. "Come, Mollie, be brave! We're not in any danger!"

"Don't move! Don't move!" she pleaded. "It will see us!"

"No, it won't. We're in the shadow. Even if it did . . ."

"Oh, I should die!" she moaned.

But she managed to totter to her feet, and I led her back among the palms. The last glimpse I had of it, it was quite near: I could see it clearly—it was not to be mistaken . . .

"Come!" I said. "Hurry! There's no danger!"

We stumbled dazedly on—startled by the black trunk of every palm we passed—shaking at the whisper of the breeze in the long fronds overhead—glancing fearfully back . . .

But there ahead was a light—such a warm, friendly light! There were the tents, looking more home-like than I had ever thought they could; there were Ma Creel, and Digby, sitting side by side, chatting placidly . . .

I delivered Mollie, half-fainting, into Ma Creel's arms . . .

"Where's Davis?" I demanded; and then I remembered, and burst into the tent. Yes, there he was, torch in hand, his nose close to the coffin. "It's out there, Davis!" I panted. "It's out there!"

He cast one glance at my working face, then grabbed me by the shoulder and thrust me down upon a cot.

"Pull yourself together!" he commanded.

I did my best—with every nerve and muscle tense, I did my best.

"That's better!" he said. "Now—*what's* out there?"

"That—that thing!" I stammered. "I saw it—Mollie saw it! It was right at our heels! It's coming after Jimmy!"

"Nonsense!" he began, but I stopped him with a savage gesture.

"Don't say that!" I shouted, with sudden fury. "It isn't nonsense! I know—I saw it . . ."

And just then Creel came in, his face very white.

"What's all this?" he demanded. "What's the matter with Mollie—she's in hysterics—jabbering . . ."

"It's out there, Creel!" I gasped. "We saw it! It's after Jimmy!"

Creel's face went whiter still. He, at least, believed!

"Jimmy's ready for it!" he said, and ran trembling fingers through his hair.

"But if he shouldn't see it! If it leaped upon him from behind!"

For an instant longer Creel stared at me, then he swung around to Davis, his face hard as flint.

"Didn't I see you wearing a pistol the first day?" he demanded. "Where is it?"

Without a word Davis snapped open the bag beside his cot, took out the pistol and handed it over.

"It's loaded?"

"Ten shots."

"Come along, then," said Creel, and stepped out into the night.

"But wait!" Davis protested. "This is the wildest folly I ever heard! Do you mean to tell me seriously that you're afraid of a thing buried four thousand years . . ."

"I saw it!" I said again, and staggered to my feet and followed Creel.

"Oh, well!" said Davis, and with a gesture of despair, came after us.

Outside, we drew insensibly together, and hastened

on, under the palms—Creel first, his weapon ready ; I next ; Davis last, sending the beam from his torch to right and left and behind us—oh, behind us . . .

And then we caught the sound of the chant.

“ It’s all right ! ” said Creel, hoarsely. “ We’re in time ! ”

The next instant, the chant was drowned in a chorus of shrill cries—then it rose again—we heard the whip crack . . .

And then we came out on the slope above the camp . . .

“ Good God ! ” muttered Creel. “ Are they all dead ? ”

But they were not dead. After that wail of terror, they had flung themselves forward on their faces in the sand, grovelling hideously, paralysed with horror ; and in their midst stood Jimmy, whip in hand ; and just outside that circle of prostrate forms hovered a grisly shape . . .

“ So you’ve come, Tina ! ” called Jimmy, with a bravado which his voice belied. “ I’m ready ! ” and he cracked his whip again. “ Come closer, Tina ! You shall feel the lash again . . . ”

His voice broke sharply ; he stood an instant staring, then took a slow step forward.

“ Is it you ? ” he muttered. “ Is it you ? You are both the same, then ! I thought so ! ”

Creel had swung his pistol up—then his arm fell to his side again.

“ Look ! ” he whispered. “ Look ! ”

And I swear, as I stared out across that circle of huddled figures, I saw beyond them, on the spot where that grisly shape had hovered, a woman’s form, clad in robes that sparkled in the moonlight ; I could see her shining eyes ; I could see the smile

that parted her red lips ; and she raised her hand and beckoned . . .

“ Quick ! ” cried Davis. “ Quick ! It’s the ape ! I was sure of it ! ”

“ No, no ! ” I gasped. “ It’s the girl—it’s . . . ”

Jimmy took another slow step forward.

Then, from the corner of my eye, I saw Creel’s pistol-arm swing up again ; and I sprang wildly upon him and pulled it down.

“ You can’t do that ! ” I sobbed. “ You can’t do that ! It’s murder ! ”

“ Let me go ! ” panted Creel, and tried to throw me off. “ Billy . . . ”

He stopped, staring ; and looking over my shoulder, I saw that figure, now luminous, now dark, glide swiftly away into the desert, gazing back with alluring eyes—eyes that promised everything . . .

And Jimmy followed. It was our scene of the afternoon over again—but this time in deadly earnest !

We watched them, spell-bound, as they moved away . . .

“ Give me that pistol ! ” growled Davis between set teeth, and tried to take it, but Creel shook himself free.

“ I’m all right,” he said. “ Come on—we must catch them ! If they once get out into the desert . . . ”

But they were headed not toward the desert, but toward the mounds which marked the ruins. Jimmy was running now, his arms outstretched ; and the figure he pursued glided on just beyond his reach.

It was luminous no longer . . . it was black and menacing. . . . A moment more, and both of them vanished among the mounds.

What would happen to him there ? What dreadful thing would happen to him there ? Over and over I asked myself that question, as we raced on.

She would lure him into the tomb ; and there, in the terrible blackness, what awful thing . . .

The silence was rent by a wild cry of triumph.

“ He’s got her ! ” gasped Creel ; but the words were drowned by a scream so shrill, so fiendish, so inhuman . . .

We scrambled up a mound of loose sand, clawing for a foothold, and the excavation lay before us, bathed in moonlight . . .

Near the black entrance to the tomb, a ghastly struggle was in progress. We could hear a man’s gasping breath ; we could hear an inhuman voice chuckling as in triumph ; and then there was a shrill cry of pain, and we saw Jimmy trying to tear himself away from something that caught and held and dragged him down—something dark and hideous and ape-like, that dragged him toward the blackness . . .

I shall never cease to admire Creel. It was he who rushed for the steps—who sped down them three at a time. I am glad to think that Davis and I were close behind !

“ All right, Jimmy ! ” shouted Creel. “ We’re here ! Hold on ! ”

The struggle paused for an instant ; then the dark shape shook itself free and darted for the hole. Creel’s arm snapped up and he fired ; and then we were at the entrance to the tomb ; and Creel sprang inside and fired again ; and I saw the flash of the powder ; and then the beam from Davis’s torch leaped through the blackness . . .

“ Come back ! Come back ! ” he cried, and caught Creel by the shoulder and dragged him back.

There was a crash like thunder ; the world fell to pieces about us , . .

CHAPTER XXXII

AS I wiped the dust from my eyes, gasping, choking, half-stunned, I realized what had happened—the roof of the tomb had fallen in. And Creel? Yes, there he was; safe, thank heaven, with Davis still dragging at his arm . . .

It was plain enough—the heavy vault, groaning under the weight of the tons of sand which the winds of forty centuries had piled above it, hanging by a thread since the removal of the supporting wall, scarcely braced at all by the rude prop which Davis and Mustafa had hastily reared, had been brought crashing down by the detonation of Creel's pistol-shot. The debris, hundreds and hundreds of tons of it, filled the tomb from side to side. The entrance to the inner chamber was irrevocably blocked. Whatever it was had flitted along that passage, would never emerge again.

That was the thought which filled my mind, as I stood blinking at the ruins, and I found myself murmuring, "Thank God! Thank God! Thank God!" over and over. Thank God that horror was forever buried; thank God no other ear would ever hear that beating on the wall; thank God that age-long dream of vengeance must remain unsatisfied . . .

But must it!

And suddenly I remembered Jimmy. Perhaps it had done its work, with claw and fang—perhaps . . .

Creel was already kneeling beside that body, flung limply on the sand, peering anxiously down into its face.

“Bring the light!” he called, and slipped a hand inside of Jimmy’s shirt. “He’s not dead,” he added in a moment. “His heart’s beating. Let me see.”

He took the torch from Davis’s hand and turned it upon the unconscious face. There were ugly purple marks about the throat, but the chest suddenly rose and fell convulsively with a laboured breath. We had been in time! But what was that dark spot, spreading across the shoulder?

With a little cry, Creel tore back the shirt, almost before I realized that the spot was blood.

With his handkerchief, he wiped the blood away. In the top of the shoulder was a savage bite . . .

And just then Jimmy opened his eyes.

“Where is she?” he gasped, and his hand groped for the whip, which had fallen close beside him, found it, and grabbed it tight. “Where is she?” and he thrust Creel aside and sat erect.

“Lie still, Jimmy!” said Creel. “You’re too weak . . .”

“I’m all right! Where is she?”

“She’s gone,” said Creel. “She will never trouble you again!”

“I am not so sure of that!” Jimmy muttered. “Help me up.”

We raised him to his feet. He staggered for an instant and pressed his hand against his eyes, as though to conquer a sudden giddiness. Then he straightened up and looked around.

“I’m all right!” he said again. “Now—where is she? In the tomb, isn’t she?”

"Yes," said Creel; "she's in the tomb."

I saw the convulsive shudder that shook Jimmy from head to foot—a shudder of mortal terror. Then his lips drew away from his teeth in an ugly snarl, and his grip on the whip tightened.

"I'm going after her!" he said. "I'm not afraid! And by God, this time I'll finish it! She can't get away in there!"

"It's no use," said Creel. "Look!" And he threw the light from the torch over the towering, tumbled mass of sand and rock. "She will never get out again!"

For an instant Jimmy stood staring as though unable to believe his eyes. Then a great breath of relief shook him.

"You are sure she went in?" he asked.

"We all saw her. I took two shots at her. That's what brought the roof down."

Jimmy's face was alight with triumph, as he sent his lash cracking forward into the darkness.

"Good-bye, Tina!" he called. "Good-bye—you're safe now for all eternity!" and he turned back to us, and I saw how his eyes were shining. "I've won!" he cried. "I've won, Creel! You don't know yet—but you will . . ." His eyes fell upon the pistol-butt protruding from the pocket where Creel had hastily thrust it. "Have you any shots left?" he asked.

"Yes—eight."

"Let me have it."

Creel hesitated an instant, then placed the weapon in Jimmy's outstretched hand. He supposed, I think, as I did, that Jimmy wanted to discharge those shots toward the imprisoned Tina. Instead, he thrust the pistol into his own pocket.

"Thanks!" he said. "I may need it. I must hurry—I've got a lot to do."

"Wait!" shouted Creel, as he turned away. "A lot to do? What do you mean? The first thing you've got to do is to have that wound dressed."

"What wound?"

"On the shoulder—you were bitten . . ."

Jimmy glanced down, his head awry, and saw the dark red stain.

"Bitten, eh?" he laughed. "Well—she's fond of biting! Mustafa can tell you that!" And he sprang up the steps and out of sight.

"What the devil is he up to?" Creel demanded, staring after him. "I was a fool to give him that pistol!" he added, half to himself.

"Yes," agreed Davis, crisply, "I think you were."

"Somehow I couldn't help it," Creel explained and mopped his forehead. "There was something in his eyes . . ."

"But it's not the first time to-night," Davis went on. "Why didn't you shoot that ape?"

"Look here, Professor," and Creel swung full upon him, "on your word of honour, now, do you really believe it was an ape?"

"Certainly I do," answered Davis, sharply; "a chimpanzee, to be exact—the mate, no doubt, of the one I killed last fall."

"It didn't look like an ape," protested Creel. "It looked like that dried-up, blackened body I saw lying on the floor of the inner tomb."

"But, great heavens, man," began Davis, in a voice shrill with exasperation, "do you realize . . ."

"Yes," said Creel, "I realize the monstrous absurdity of it. Nevertheless, I believe that is what it was!"

"So do I!" I burst in. "Why, you saw it—both of you—you saw it change to a woman—to the Princess—you saw the shimmering garments . . ."

"I saw the moonlight shining on its fur," said Davis. "The rest existed only in your superheated imagination, son! Though I suppose you saw the lady, too!" he snorted at Creel.

"Yes," answered Creel, soberly, "I did. That's why I couldn't fire."

Davis tossed his arms despairingly above his head.

"It's a breeder of lunatics, that's what it is—this moving-picture business! You're mad, both of you! It was an ape, I tell you! Why, don't you see," he added excitedly, "this makes it all clear!"

"No, I don't see," said Creel doggedly.

"It was the ape that was in that rear chamber—it was the ape beat upon the wall—it was the ape scratched Allen . . ."

Creel stood staring.

"How could it get in there?" he demanded.

"I don't know—perhaps the wall had given way, or a bit of the roof fallen in—there's a crevice somewhere—and the ape crept in, frightened by us, perhaps, and couldn't get out—and it beat against the wall when it heard us, for it would be half-crazed with thirst—but when we got the stone out, we frightened it again, and it hid away in a corner, except for that one dash at Allen—and then, as soon as we went away, it worked that loose stone out of place, and ran over to the well, and then skirmished around the native camp, looking for something to eat—for it would be hungry, of course—yes, and emaciated just like the body . . ."

Creel passed his hand dazedly before his eyes.

"Perhaps you're right," he said. "I hope you are—it seems to hang together. Just the same . . ."

"No, it's not picturesque," sneered Davis. "It's not . . ."

And then we stood rigid, staring into each other's eyes, for, from the direction of the oasis, came the sharp crack of a pistol.

"Good God!" groaned Creel. "It's that madman!" And he darted for the steps.

Blood-curdling visions flashed through my brain as I panted after him—I saw the Princess in her cataleptic sleep—I saw the spirit leave the body and float out across the sand and enter the inner chamber—and that other body suddenly stirred and sat erect and rubbed its eyes; and stole out of the ruins and back across the sand, on its deadly errand—and I remembered Jimmy's shout of triumph . . .

"I've won! I've won! You don't know how—but you will!"

And he had seized the pistol and sped up the steps . . .

What was it he had planned? What desperate deed? To rush in upon the girl—to sit beside her, pistol in hand, and wait . . .

Or, perhaps, not to wait, not to let her waken, but to press the pistol to her temple . . .

I am sure it was some such vision as this which urged the others forward, too, until we all were gasping for breath . . .

And then my heart leaped sickeningly, for a shrill screaming rent the air—the scream of a soul in torment . . .

"Good God!" panted Creel again, and paused. But Davis laughed mockingly.

"Another ghost!" he sneered. "Or perhaps a banshee!"

"What is it, then?" gasped Creel.

"It's just a camel howling!" snorted Davis.

In a moment, another took up the cry, and then another. We were quite close to the oasis now, and Davis stopped and stared with frowning brows toward the native camp, where the camels were tethered.

"We'd better see what is going on over there," he said. "Camels don't scream like that for nothing. Surely, those natives . . ."

He broke off and hurried on, his lips compressed. Then we caught the murmur of excited voices, and another voice shouting commands—Jimmy's voice. The chanting had ceased . . .

And just as we reached the first group of palms, a weird procession passed like a shadow before us. At its head marched Jimmy, with Mustafa a pace behind; then came three camels, and then the whole string of fellahin . . .

They were headed in the direction of the tents . . .

"He's gone mad!" said Creel, hoarsely. "He's starting a mutiny!"

"Come on!" said Davis. "We must head him off!" and together we dashed toward the tents.

We reached them first, and were welcomed with gasps of relief by Ma Creel and Mollie, who were white and shaking.

"He's been here," whispered Ma Creel. "He ran past into your tent and stayed there a minute, and then came out and ran toward the camp . . ."

"Is the Princess still asleep?" asked Creel.

"How do I know? Do you suppose I'd go in . . ."

And then Jimmy strode out from the shadow of

the palms, with Mustafa at his elbow, and the three camels towering behind him, and the rabble of natives bringing up the rear.

Creel went forward steadily to meet him. Good old Creel—I take off my hat to you!

“What does this mean, Jimmy?” he demanded, sternly, and from his look you would have thought it was he who had the pistol.

“I’m going to leave you, Warrie,” Jimmy answered sweetly, without a trace of the excitement I had feared.

“We are all going back to-morrow,” Creel pointed out.

“I can’t wait till to-morrow,” said Jimmy. “I’ve got to go to-night.”

“You *can’t* go to-night.”

“Yes, I can, Warrie—and what is more, I am!” said Jimmy, quietly. “Don’t try to stop me. It wouldn’t do any good—and it might do a lot of harm.”

There was not a trace of threat in his tone; but his hand fell carelessly to the pistol-butt, and he stood for an instant looking smilingly into Creel’s eyes. Back of that smile was a meaning there was no mistaking. Creel saw it—and drew back a pace. He realized the uselessness of argument.

“That’s right,” said Jimmy, with a nod. “That’s sensible.”

“But you will lose your way,” Creel protested. “You’ll die of thirst.”

“I can’t lose my way,” said Jimmy. “The river is to the west—I couldn’t miss it possibly—I have only to follow the moon by night and the sun by day. As for thirst, I want to load one camel with food and water. You have plenty—and I’ll

pay for it—and for the camels, too, if anything happens to them—out of my salary. I leave all that to you.”

“Is it so, Mustafa?” Creel demanded. “Is it so that he can’t miss the river if he holds to the west?”

“That iss so, saar,” said Mustafa. “North and south the river stretches, hundreds of miles.”

“What provisions will he need?”

“He should have provisions for a week, saar.”

“Give him provisions for two weeks,” said Creel. “Or for three weeks, if he can carry them. That is, if he is really determined on this crazy project.”

“I am,” said Jimmy. “If I can’t have the provisions, I will go without.”

“Of course you can have them,” said Creel. “All you can carry,” and Mustafa, calling a force of natives, hastened to the supply tent.

A moment later, the camels, protesting loudly, were forced to kneel, and one of them was quickly laden. I saw that the other two were fitted with saddles; and it occurred to me that Jimmy was not taking much of a chance, since he evidently intended taking a guide along. No doubt he had already picked one of the men.

“There is one thing, Warrie,” said Jimmy. “If you have any extra cartridges for this pistol, I wish you would let me have them.”

“It isn’t my pistol,” Creel began, and turned to Davis, but the latter had already started for our tent. He reappeared in a moment, a box of cartridges in his hand.

“There you are,” he said, and Jimmy slipped them into his pocket with a nod of thanks.

“How about your wound?” asked Creel. “It ought to be dressed.”

"It's all right," said Jimmy. "I washed it out and dabbed some iodine on it when I changed my shirt just now."

"All is ready, saar," announced Mustafa, coming forward and reporting to Jimmy as to a natural and recognized commander. "You will not forget—the river is to the west, always to the west. To the south, there is only the desert—the great desert—that star yonder . . ."

"I know," said Jimmy. "Stand back, everybody!"

And suddenly he raised his arm and cracked the whip.

"Tina!" he called. "I'm ready! I'm waiting!"

And again the whip cracked.

And suddenly I understood. I stared toward the door of the women's tent, my hair on end . . .

"Tina!"

The call was commanding, insistent, not to be denied . . .

The tent-flap was thrust aside—the girl came slowly out, like one walking in her sleep.

"I'm ready!" Jimmy said again, and held out his hand.

She came slowly forward, as though impelled by a force she was powerless to resist, and placed her hand in his; and he led her forward to the camels.

Not till then did Creel understand.

"No, no!" he shouted. "That won't do, Jimmy! I won't have that!"

Jimmy never so much as glanced at him; he only thrust the whip under one arm, and drew the revolver from his pocket and held it ready.

"Mount, Tina!" he said; and the girl stepped up into the seat on the camel's back.

In an instant he had leaped into the other seat—the camels rose growling to their feet—and then I saw that they were tethered together by stout leading-ropes. Mustafa had certainly thought of everything . . .

For a moment, Jimmy looked down into our upturned, staring faces, and his eyes were like coals of fire.

"Good-bye, friends," he said. "Good-bye, Ma Creel!"

"Oh, Jimmy!" she cried, and ran forward toward him. "*Must* you go?"

"Yes—there's no other way!"

He sat an instant longer looking at us, then he struck his camel sharply, and turned him toward the desert. The others followed . . .

We strung along behind, overwhelmed, inarticulate . . .

In a moment we were at the edge of the oasis. Jimmy looked back at us and waved his hand.

"Good-bye, everybody!" he called again.

The girl stared straight before her, out across the sand, erect and motionless, as though struck to stone.

Spell-bound, we stood watching them as they faded away through the moonlight.

"My God!" said Creel, suddenly. "He's not going west—look, he's going south! Toward the desert!"

He started to run forward; stopped; came slowly back.

"He's mad!" said Mollie, bitterly. "So is she. I have known it from the first!"

But Creel, his eyes on those dim shapes, fading out against the horizon, shook his head impatiently.

"They're not mad!" he said, hoarsely. "They're sane—supremely sane! Saner than any of us! Ahead of them is romance, adventure—and they're riding forth to meet it!"

"There's death ahead of them!" said Ma Creel, softly, and I could see the glimmer of the tears which were streaming down her cheeks.

"There's life ahead of them!" said Creel. "If we weren't fools and cowards, we'd ride after them . . ."

But alas and alas for romance and high adventure! it was toward Luxor and civilization and the lights of Broadway we turned our faces next day.

Alas for romance, did I say? For Creel, perhaps; for Digby; not for me.

For Mollie rode close beside me.

EPILOGUE

IT was last night I read them the story, clustered around the table in Creel's library. They were all there—Creel and his wife and Mollie and Davis and old Digby—and when I had finished, they sat silently for a moment, weighted down with poignant memory. Then Creel leaned forward across the table and held out his hand.

“It's fine!” he said. “Nobody could have done it better!”

I tried to protest that it was no great feat—that I had only set down what had happened—that there was no art about it—but Creel wouldn't listen. Nor would the others. And Mollie's eyes were very tender.

“The only trouble with it is,” said Ma Creel, at last, “that it doesn't end—it just stops.”

“There isn't any end,” said Creel. “There never will be—not as far as we're concerned. We'll have to imagine it for ourselves.”

And then there was another silence, broken only by the rustling of paper, as I gathered my manuscript together. Each of us, I suppose, was trying to imagine what the end had been . . .

Many things have happened since that day—how long ago it seems!—when we had said good-bye to the oasis. Sekenyen-Rē rests gloriously in a glass case at the Metropolitan; there are rumours of a great work which Davis is preparing. We had

our hour triumph, too, when "A King in Babylon" was shown for the first time. But I needn't tell that story! Those who haven't seen the picture, have at least read about it, for the papers gave flaring headlines to the sensation it created; and then more flaring headlines to the money it was earning—"A Poem Makes a Million!" "A Gold-mine in 'Poets' Corner'!"—well, those were exaggerations but not such great ones . . .

At least, we were on Easy Street again, with reputation re-established. The trouble was to live up to it! . . .

Davis sat there scrabbling at his beard, in the familiar way, and looking at us with that quizzical smile of his.

"Yes," he said, at last, "we shall have to imagine the end for ourselves. What is your guess, Mrs. Williams?"

"I'm almost afraid to think of it," answered Mollie, slowly, "for of course they just rode on and on till they could go no farther . . ."

"Nonsense!" broke in Creel. "They travelled on and on, till they came to a wonderful oasis, far out in the desert, whose people had never seen a white man, and they are living there to-day, worshipped as gods, just as they were in Egypt four thousand years ago . . ."

"Behold the movie imagination working!" commented Davis. "I'm afraid you'll never outgrow it, Creel."

"I don't want to outgrow it!" Creel retorted. "It's a heaven-sent gift! Come, then, since you're so wise—tell us what really happened!"

Davis smiled around at us again, and there was something in his face that brought us upright.

"Oh, Professor!" Ma Creel began. "Do you really know . . ."

"I really know very little—and I warn you it isn't at all romantic! It won't make a picture!"

"Well, let's have it, anyway," growled Creel.

"What I *do* know amounts to this: it wasn't toward the illimitable desert that Jimmy Allen rode away that night. It was toward another oasis not far south of ours. Mustafa confessed to me that he had told Allen about it, and how to get there. Allen had been consulting him, it seems . . ."

"Yes," I broke in; "I stumbled over them, one night, with their heads together!"

"Of course Mustafa was well paid," Creel added; "and no doubt he has taken care that the two shouldn't perish!"

Creel ran his hand perplexedly through his hair.

"I always admire your explanations, Professor," he said; "they are adroit and they hang together; but they never satisfy me. For there is an element—and a very important one—you don't take into account—a supernatural element . . ."

"Poof!" scoffed Davis.

"And furthermore, they haven't always worked out. You will remember you couldn't find any opening at the back of the ruins—not so much as a crack . . ."

"I had only an hour to look for it," Davis broke in, "you were in such an infernal hurry to leave. Besides, the sand may have drifted over it."

"And finally," Creel concluded, "I have the feeling that all these theories of yours have been just a sort of desperate barricade between yourself and the unknown . . ."

"Why, I admit that!" cried Davis. "I've tried to find a rational explanation for events which were very puzzling, and I haven't always succeeded . . ."

"We'll give you one more chance," said Creel.

"Assuming that Jimmy *did* conspire with Mustafa and reach the oasis, what was his game? Do you mean to say that all those heroics were a fake?"

"No," Davis answered slowly, "I don't think they were a fake—at least, not altogether. Jimmy was desperately in love with that girl—he felt that he couldn't live without her, and he realized that the only way he could get her was by some monstrous coup. But events got a grip on him and whirled him along out of his depth—and undoubtedly there was a psychic element which grew stronger and stronger—he was just a sort of inspired lunatic at the end—it's always dangerous to meddle with the unknown . . ."

His voice trailed away, and again there was a little silence. It was almost like those shadowed days in the desert . . .

"Do you know the position of that oasis?" Creel demanded, at last.

"Mustafa does."

"By George, I've a notion to organize an expedition and test your theory! Consider my position, Professor! I discover the greatest star the screen has ever known! I produce a tremendous picture! And then I'm done—my star has disappeared! Why, if necessary, I'll go out to that oasis and build a studio there . . ."

"Oh, you won't have to do that!" said Davis. "Some night there'll come a knock at the door . . ."
Will there? I wonder!

THE END

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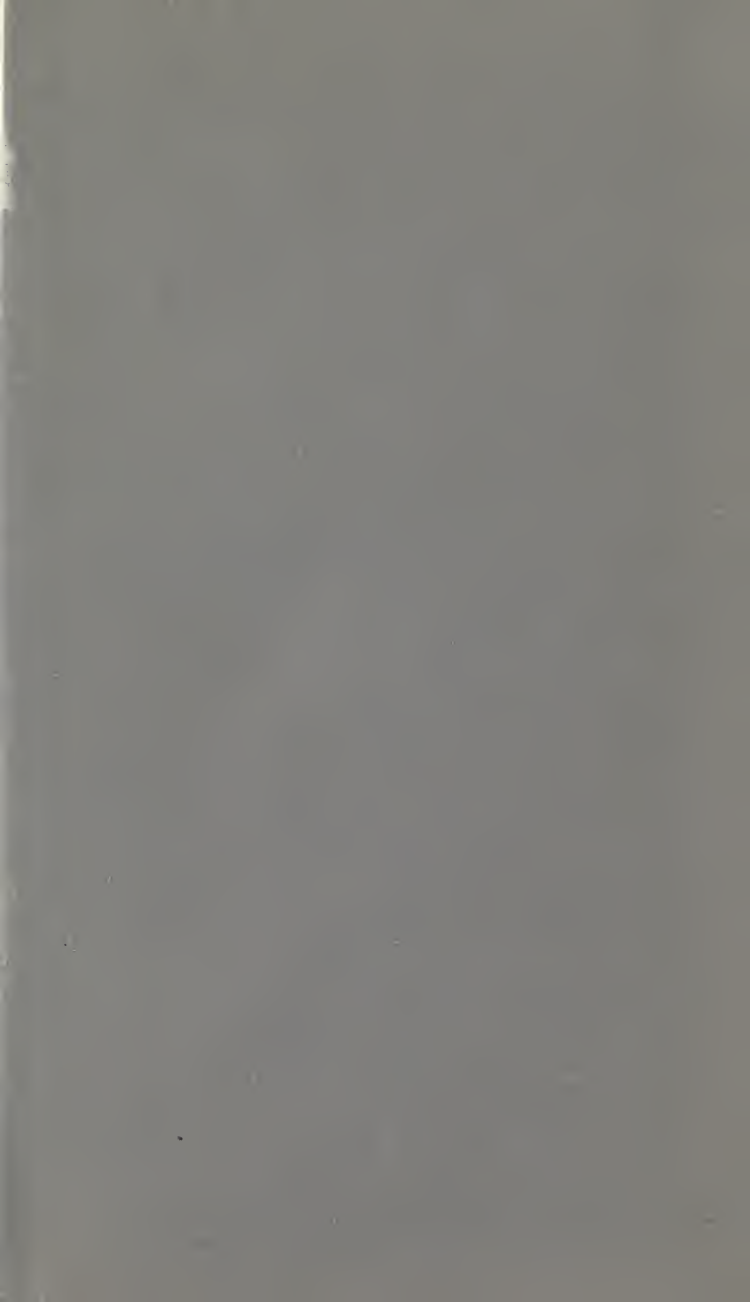
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